

April 19, 2020
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John 20:19-31 I Missed It!
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

John 20:19-31 New Revised Standard Version

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

At night in my house, we are watching movies. The story of Thomas always makes me think of an old movie. Now, when I say old movie, there will be different viewpoints, but Thomas' story makes me think of a moment from 1986's *Pretty in Pink*. Andie, played by actress Molly Ringwald, is talking to her record store boss Iona about the prom. Iona shares about a friend who didn't go to her prom and every once in a while this friend gets a really terrible feeling, like something is missing. The friend checks her purse. She checks her keys. She counts her kids. She goes crazy and then she realizes that nothing is missing. She decided it was side effects from skipping the prom. This year we have seniors in high school who would give anything to be able to go to their prom. That scene from *Pretty in Pink* reminds me of Thomas because he missed it.

We have this story in John's Gospel about the experience of Jesus' resurrection by those who were closest to Jesus. It is the same day as Easter morning when Mary found the empty tomb, but the disciples aren't outside at the tomb celebrating. They are hiding behind locked doors. The disciples were filled with grief and disbelief and fear. Jesus was supposed to have been their hope. He was supposed to have been the Messiah, the Savior, the fulfillment of God's promise.

Jesus appears suddenly and greets them with the words, "Peace be with you." Jesus shows them his wounds and they are so excited because they saw Jesus. They had the experience. They didn't miss out. Then, Jesus breathes on them, which we can't even imagine in our life right now. If someone got close enough to breathe on me, I might punch them! That breath from Jesus is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Thomas wasn't there. The others told him all about it, but he wasn't there. He didn't have the experience so he doesn't believe. A week later, Jesus appears again and shows Thomas his wounds, invites Thomas to touch them, and says to him, "Do not doubt but believe." Thomas calls Jesus, "My Lord and my God." I believe Thomas is known as doubting Thomas because of Jesus' next question to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

We call Thomas doubting because he required to see before he believed, but everyone else, Mary and the disciples, had an experience of seeing Jesus before they believed. I am someone that has to see before I believe, so I totally get it. What helps me to have faith is when I see the faith of others. What helps me to focus on gratitude is when I see the gratitude of others. What helps me to focus on joy is when I see the joy of others.

Thomas didn't have the same experience as the others but Christ came to him just the same. We didn't have the same experience of Easter this year as we have in the past, but Christ came just the same. We all experience Christ's presence in different ways. For some of us, it is in music. For others, it is in the laughter of children or being outside. For some of us, slowing down and reading a book is when we feel Christ's presence. I know that for many of us, being in this sanctuary is healing for you. Last week when we sang the words for communion, I imagined all of you here in this place singing with us and it made me sad and happy at the same time. Christ comes to us, we only have to open our eyes to see.

In the Christian Church we have fifty days of Easter. Fifty days for us to celebrate life coming out of death. Fifty days for us to celebrate God's best work being done in the dark when no one knows it is happening. Christ has risen and we are reminded once again about God's ability to make a way out of no way. Easter is hope and a pandemic does not change that truth. During these fifty days of Easter we are going to be talking about hope. To wonder together how we can have hope when our lives have been turned upside down. How do you have hope when you watch the news and people have lost jobs, people have lost their lives and every day we learn of more people who are sick. Fifty days for us to remember that we have hope because the cross is not the end of the story.

Thomas' story makes me wonder how we can have hope when we have missed "the" event. How can we find peace when life isn't normal? How do we keep being an Easter person for the great fifty days of Easter?

As I read Thomas' story this week, I wondered why Thomas wasn't in the room with everyone else? Maybe Thomas likes life to be clear and concrete, so he went back home, to his life that he knew. Maybe he wanted things to get back to normal. I identify with that! The last time Thomas had seen Jesus was on Friday when he was nailed to a cross. When he does have his experience with the risen Christ, I wonder if he realized that there would be no normal to go back to. There is no normal when someone has been raised from the dead. The reality of Easter changes your work, your sense of meaning, your relationships, your purpose, your view of past, present, and future.¹

It is so easy for us to give in to our fears, but there is always a small, resilient voice that says hope is near. I find hope in all of you being the church for me. When you share a social media post of beauty and words of encouragement you are being the church for me. When you text or make a phone call to keep connection alive, you are being the church for me. The church is found when we offer thanksgiving for one another and when we confess our fears. The church is found when we receive new hope.

Hope is alive in all the ways that we reach out to one another across this social distance. Hope is alive when grandparents video chat with their grandchildren or when Sharon Bradley talks to her dad through a fence. Wednesday night I listened to my daughter laugh for almost an entire hour as the youth group zoomed and played games together. Then, she got really quiet as she listened as they shared their highs and lows together. Hope lives in us, in the ways that we

¹ <https://www.davidlose.net/2020/04/easter-2-a-2020-the-new-normal/>

learn to show love and care for one another. We have to practice hope, it is a muscle that needs to be exercised.

Thomas didn't have the same experience as the others but Christ came to him just the same. Some folks have reveled in their quarantine, as they social distance and others are struggling. I have good days and hard days. I have days when I am sad and I know that I need to go outside. I need to breathe outside air. We need to remember to focus on grace and self-compassion each and every day. Take a walk, take a bath, take a nap, take deep breaths, ask for help. Know that whatever you are feeling is completely normal, and whatever you need to do to love on and care for you during this time is okay.

When I was a new pastor I felt pretty alone. I was in the wonderful community of Krum, but my husband traveled during the week and we were a newly married couple. I remember one day my District Superintendent called to see how I was doing. I burst into tears. It was a simple act, a phone call, but it showed me that someone cared about me and I wasn't alone. Is there someone in your life that needs a phone call? If you are that someone, I hope that you will reach out to someone. Reach out to me! Reach out to the person who you used to sit beside when we could sit in our beautiful sanctuary.

Thomas shows us that faith isn't easy and that doubt never breaks God's love for us. Thomas teaches us that we can offer to God our pain and God will give us peace. Easter calls us to hope in one another and also to hope in a future we cannot yet see or imagine. As we struggle to find our new normal in this awkward and difficult time, may we remember that just as God gave Thomas peace, God gives us peace. May we discover Jesus among us saying, "Peace be with you," just as he told the disciples. And through that peace, may we find hope.