

Scripture Lesson: John 20:19-29

Pew Bible N.T. pg. 109

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." ²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ 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." ²⁷ 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." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ 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."

Response to the Word

L: This is the Word of God for the people of God

P: Thanks be to God!

John 20:19-29

04/07/2024 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

"Every Trembling Heart"

Pastor Amy Terhune

Let's start with a brainteaser this morning. What is the one phrase that nobody likes to hear, but everybody likes to say? Any ideas? The phrase is, "*I told you so.*" When someone doesn't listen to us, they ignore our advice and get themselves in trouble, we find great satisfaction in being able to say, "I told you so." But we absolutely hate it when others are proven right, and they throw those words at us. Given that none of us like to hear it, we should probably be a lot more sparing about saying it, particularly to those we love.

Nashville Preacher King Duncan tells about "...Dr. Barry Marshall of Australia, who was an internist that saw many of his patients suffer with, and even die from, peptic ulcers. In some cases, the patients had their stomachs removed completely. In others, the peptic ulcers turned into stomach cancer. The medical establishment in Australia believed, as did doctors in our country, that ulcers were caused primarily by stress, and so their best treatments involved antacids and stress relief techniques. But Marshall and his colleague, Dr. Robin Warren, had done research that led them to believe that ulcers were caused by a common and easily-treated stomach bacteria, *H. pylori*.

Despite solid scientific research, they were largely ignored by the medical, academic, and pharmaceutical world for a long time. They couldn't get published, and their research was not taken seriously. Finally, Dr. Marshall took drastic action. He made up an *H. pylori* cocktail and drank it himself. Within days, he was vomiting frequently, in horrible pain and developed a peptic ulcer. Then he treated himself with a course of antibiotics and completely healed his ulcer. As a result, medical journals around the world began publishing their research. Dr. Barry Marshall and Dr. Robin Warren

were awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 2005. And today, peptic ulcers are easily treatable and stomach cancer is rare in the Western world. All because one doctor decided to make himself sick to offer the world a cure. [from “The Doctor Who Drank Infectious Broth, Gave Himself an Ulcer, and Solved a Medical Mystery” by Pamela Weintraub, *Discover*, March 2010, <http://discovermagazine.com/2010/mar/07-dr-drank-broth-gave-ulcer-solved-medical-mystery>; as used in “The Phrase We Never Want to Hear” by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.] Dr. Marshall and Dr. Warren could have said “I told you so!” to a lot of people. But they didn’t.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus also could have said “I told you so” to a lot of people. I told you, over and over again, that the Son of Man must be betrayed and in three days, rise again. He predicts his death and resurrection 3 times in each of Matthew (chs. 16, 17, 20), Mark (Chs. 8, 9, 10), and Luke (chs. 9, 18), for a total of 9 times. He predicts his death and resurrection another 8 or 9 times in John’s gospel (chs. 6, 9, 12, 13, 14). He told them so literally dozens of times!!! Why don’t they get that? I don’t know. Maybe because they just didn’t understand. Maybe because they could never see past their own expectations. Maybe for the same reason that I never heard my mom tell me to take out the trash until she was no longer asking nicely. I don’t know.

But Jesus doesn’t say “I told you so.” In Matthew and Luke, the angels say it to the women at the empty tomb, but not Jesus. Jesus never says “I told you so” even though he did. Jesus says, “Peace be with you” and he shows them his hands and side.

In our opening hymn this morning, we sang wonderful words from Charles Wesley:

Jesus, thou art all compassion; pure, unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation; enter every trembling heart.
Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit into every troubled breast!

We know that Wesley had the story of Thomas from John 20 in mind when he wrote this hymn. Remember with me that the disciples are indeed trembling and troubled. It is still the first day of the weeks. It’s the original Easter Sunday. In the last 72 hours, the disciples have seen their own weakness and failure to stand by their leader. They’ve seen Jesus betrayed, tried, beaten, and crucified. When Jews lose a loved one, they follow a ritual called “sitting shiva”. It’s eight days of mourning together. Now traditions around how Jews observe the ritual of sitting Shiva have changed across the Millenia. We can’t be sure how exactly they did that two thousand years ago, but we can be sure that they’ve been sitting Shiva, not only for their Messiah, but also for their dreams. And just that morning, women have come running back to the upper room breathlessly announcing news the disciples just can’t quite digest. No body, just grave clothes. No stone, just emptiness. No answers, just angels...and questions. The rumors fly. Speculation runs rampant. The authorities think the disciples have stolen the body to perpetuate a hoax. The doors are locked for fear. The disciples are afraid for their lives, bewildered by events, plagued with guilt and insecurity, and mired in grief.

And then... Jesus! He’s there. Locked doors, locked minds, trembling hearts, troubled souls – He can bypass it all. Friends, if you take nothing else away from the sermon today, take this: regardless of what you’ve done, or what you’re facing; regardless of the uncertainties ahead of us or the brokenness behind us; regardless of our present circumstances, resurrection is our daily reality. Doors of fear, sinkholes of guilt, walls of prejudice, storms of doubt – none of it can keep Jesus from crossing impossible barriers – even death itself – to breathe life and peace into our spirits. He came then. He comes still. He always will.

Mary Austin recalls a lovely story first told by teacher Rachel Macy Stafford, who started working fresh out college in a special-needs classroom a long way from home and family. She prayed every day that this would be the day to make a difference for a kid.

"On this particular morning," she said, "I was excited. The other lead teacher and I had spent weeks teaching the children appropriate behavior for public outings. We would be going putt-putting and out to lunch. Miraculously, most of the children in class had earned this privilege — only a few had not." But one of the students who had not was 10-year-old Kyle, and he was angry. To show it, "he began screaming, cursing, spitting, and swinging at anything within striking distance. And as soon as he got the chance, he ran... right out into the traffic in front of the school. I ran after him, but Kyle was fast.... He took a sharp left and headed through a dilapidated strip mall. [Getting tired,] he bent over with his hands on his knees, [trying] to catch his breath. That is when he saw me. I must have looked ridiculous — the front of my blouse, soaked with sweat, my once-styled hair now plastered to the side of my beet red face. He stood up abruptly ...but it was not a look of fear. I saw his body relax. He did not attempt to run again ... We returned to the school. As weeks passed, he was glued to my side, complying with instructions, attempting to do his work, and occasionally even smiling. For a child with severe attachment issues, it was quite amazing that he was developing a bond with me. One day on the way to art class, Kyle unexpectedly grasped my hand. It took me by surprise, but I didn't show it. Later, when I expressed surprise to the school therapist, she put her hand on my shoulder and explained: "Rachel, no one has ever run after him before. No one. They just let him go." [original source unknown; from "Growing Into Our Scars" by Mary Austin, www.Sermons.com.]

Friends, there are far too many people in this world who have never had anyone run after them before. They just let them go. But not Jesus. Not Jesus. He'll always run after you. He'll always show up.

But of course, one wasn't there to see and experience all this, poor Thomas. We don't know where he was. But we do know he couldn't stay away. Yet, I feel for him. He's come to sit shiva, and the mourning ritual has turned into a party. For a week after that, Thomas gathers with his fellow disciples, hearing their testimony about a risen Christ, seeing a kind of joy on their faces. But Thomas isn't feeling it. Not that he doesn't want to. But remember, the others had just such a resurrection account from Mary, and they didn't believe her either until they saw Jesus' wounds. Thomas is no different. He's not being obstinate. He's hurting. His hope has been torn to shreds and nailed on a cross. God's prophets may die, but not God's Messiah. It doesn't work that way. God's Messiah is victorious, not crucified. He's a leader, not a lamb led to slaughter. He throws off oppression, he doesn't acquiesce to it! Thomas just doesn't see what good comes of this, and he doesn't see God's hand in any of it. At least, not yet.

And so Jesus comes, through doors of fear, sinkholes of guilt, walls of prejudice, storms of doubt, to enter the trembling, breaking heart of a man whose dreams lay shattered. He comes to offer Thomas a new dream, a new vision, a new understanding of Messiah. He comes to challenge Thomas to a new quest—a quest that doesn't change the landscape of national boundaries, but eradicates the boundaries in the landscape of the heart. Touch. See. Believe. Which he does. And in that touch is life. In that seeing is vision. In that belief is life. And thus, Thomas falls to his knees with the most unequivocal statement of faith found anywhere in the New Testament: You are my Lord and my God!

He didn't need anyone to tell him so. Jesus showed him.

I want to close today with a movie clip from a film called contact, based on a novel by Carl Sagan, who found that science and faith had more in common than not. In the film, Dr. Ellie Arroway, portrayed by Jodie Foster, is a Thomas, caught between hope and loss. In the aftermath of an extra-terrestrial encounter that does not go as anyone expected, she, too, must confront her doubts and fears. This is her testimony. [see the clip here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CiG9Wgvyj0>]

I don't know about you, but that continues to be my wish, too. May it be so. Amen.