

**Scripture Lesson:** John 20:19-31

*Pew Bible N.T. pg. 109*

<sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." <sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> 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." <sup>26</sup> 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." <sup>27</sup> 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." <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> 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." <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

**Response to the Word**

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

**All: Thanks be to God!**

John 20:19-31

04/27/2025 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

"My Lord and My God"

Rev. Amy Terhune

Friday night, we celebrated my daughter Isabelle's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. As is tradition, I make whatever she wants for dinner that night. She asked for beef and noodles, which is a favorite dish in our house, so got up on a leisurely Friday morning – it's my day off, after all – and after I'd done my morning devotions and cared for the dogs, I put the beef in the crock pot, and I started my laundry and ran some errands, and along about 2:00pm or so that afternoon, I went to check on the meat. It was still as raw as raw could be, and still chilled as if it had just come out of the fridge. When Izzy got home from work around 4:00, I wished her Happy Birthday and informed her that dinner would be served tonight at midnight since her mother, exhibiting the full range of domestic skill and expertise, had forgotten to plug in the stinking crock pot. It did not take until midnight, but birthday dinner was definitely on the late side Friday night.

Now you may well wonder why I'm telling you this. It's certainly not to showcase my skills in parenting or culinary arts. The point is simply this: sometimes things don't go as planned. We laugh it off when it's a late dinner. But when the car spins out of control, or the diagnosis is devastating, or the marriage falls apart, or a loved one just won't talk to you anymore, all the best laid plans fall to pieces around our feet and we recognize how little power we actually have to direct the course of our lives or protect those we love.

In our lesson this morning, our disciples know that reality all too well. How fast things went wrong for them. On Sunday, the crowds were shouting “hosanna”. But by Friday, they were shouting “crucify him”. You and I have moved on from Easter. We have a few flowers left on the altar, dropping their petals at this point, and there’s a bit of ham in the fridge still waiting to be finished off from last week’s Easter Dinner, yet that’s about it. We’ve been back to work, back to school, back to the grind. But the church calendar isn’t so ready to let us pick up and go on. The scripture lesson for today and for next Sunday as well take place on the very first Easter. A mere 72 hours or so has passed since Jesus was arrested. It’s not even been 60 hours since they nailed him to a cross; and even less than that since he died. Only that morning, women come from the tomb with astonishing news. No body, just grave clothes. No stone, just emptiness. No answers, just angels...and questions. That is where we are. The church calendar and our scriptures call us, in this Easter Season, to tarry a bit – to dwell on that resurrection day and feel the feels, but also to recognize the power and promise. If you’ve suffered loss or heartache, I don’t mean in any way to belittle that. Quite the contrary. I mean to speak to it. Easter hope is not once and done. Easter hope is here for the long-haul. And even though we have no power over events and circumstances, we do have power over our hearts, our minds, our convictions, and our actions.

The scripture opens today by telling us, “the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews...”. Even though Peter and John run to the tomb and see its emptiness; see the grave clothes shed and left behind, they don’t quite know how to process it all. So they go home and they lock the doors again. For fear of the Jews. Now, let me offer an observation here: it says ‘for fear of the Jews’, but the reality is that no one else can force us to be afraid. External forces may exacerbate our fear, but fear comes from within. However, it has been said that fear acknowledged is freedom. If we allow ourselves to examine our fear, deal with our fear, be honest about our fear and bring it out into the open, we are almost certain to defeat it. On the other hand, when we deny, belittle, ignore, or bottle up our fear, it imprisons us. And so I find it profoundly symbolic that John would tell us “the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear.” They have imprisoned themselves in fear—fear of the past, fear of the future, fear of the present. They’re stuck, you see. They’re mired in grief, in disappointment, in shock. And yes, they’re afraid. Afraid because they just can’t see how God brings anything out of this.

I read a story recently about how, “...on December 26, 1944, Japanese Intelligence Officer Hiroo Onoda, arrived on Lubang Island in the Philippines. Onoda’s orders were simple. He and his men were to secure and hold the island at all costs. But before their Japanese military unit could destroy the airstrip and blow up the pier, American forces landed and captured Lubang Island. Onoda and three other Japanese soldiers fled to the hills and hid.

“They were still hiding a year later. Onoda discovered a leaflet that read, “The war ended on August 15. Come down from the mountains!” But he refused. His orders were clear. Under no circumstances was he to surrender. An aircraft dropped letters and pictures from Onoda’s family, urging him to come down. Still he refused. Unable to reach his superiors, Onoda and his men burrowed deeper into the hills. Five years later, in 1949, one of the men surrendered to Filipino forces. In 1954, members of a search party accidentally killed the second of Onoda’s men. And in 1973, local police mistakenly shot the last of his comrades. Now only Onoda remained, alone and forgotten, fighting a war he’d already lost...

“On March 9, 1974, nearly thirty years after he first went into hiding, Onoda emerged from the jungle. He surrendered his uniform, sword, rifle, hand grenades, and 500 rounds of ammunition. He’d already surrendered thirty years of his life to isolation and fear and old-world prejudices. What a tragic waste. Jesus doesn’t mean for any of us to live that way, trapped in fear, looking backward to an old

world. [3 ¶s from <http://cccenterhope.blogspot.com/2012/12/peace-of-mind.html>; as used in “Peace Be With You” by King Duncan, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com)]

No, Jesus means for his followers to have peace. But resurrection eyes don't come naturally. They're born of Easter hope. And that is what Jesus teaches us today. What Jesus does for those disciples that night is prove he's alive. He shows them the scars. He breathes on them. But even more, Jesus proves that God is alive – that impossible feats are happening; that death is defeated; that sin has no power, that God's plans are way bigger than their own petty little dreams of political revolution; that incredible things are about to happen. And ultimately, I think Jesus proves to them that they are still alive – that not only is there breath in their lungs, but there is fire in their bones, hope in the hearts, purpose in the steps, healing in their hands, grace in their words, love in the eyes, courage in their guts, and faith enough to move mountains at their very core. Christ is risen and alive and SO ARE THEY!!!

Friends, if you take nothing else away from the sermon today, take this: Jesus wants to prove to you that you're still alive. Jesus would have you know that regardless of what you've done or where you've been; 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.

But of course, one of them missed it. For whatever reason, Thomas wasn't there. We don't know why. It's not important. What interests me far more is that he was there a week later. All week Thomas has gathered with his fellow disciples, hearing their testimony about a risen Christ, seeing a kind of joy on their faces, while he still struggles with basic questions. So we can't be too hard on him when he refuses to believe the testimonies of the others that Christ is alive. Remember, the others had just such a witness from Mary, and they didn't believe her either until they saw Jesus' wounds. So that fact that Thomas wants to see the wounds simply puts him in the same boat with everybody else. He's got to see it, experience it, witness firsthand.

You see, I don't think Thomas is doubting so much as he is disillusioned. There's a difference. Doubts, for all intents and purposes, are intellectual in nature. Doubts arise when things don't make sense. As King Duncan puts it, doubts come with having a brain. [from “Disillusioned Thomas” by King Duncan, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).]

But disillusionment is what seeps into the cracks of a broken heart. Disillusionment rears up when dreams die, when expectations aren't met, when things don't turn out the way we hoped they would. We can get disillusioned with a job, a marriage, a place, or a movement. Thomas has all but had the hope crushed out of him. Has his courage been for nothing? Has his trust been misplaced and misguided? Has his reason been utterly deceived? Thomas doesn't need holes and hands—he needs someone to prove that all of this means something. And so, Jesus comes to prove he's still alive.

Jesus comes, I think, to dis-illusion Thomas, if I may play on the word. Jesus comes to rid Thomas of illusions. Jesus comes through closed doors to meet a broken-hearted man whose dreams lay shattered. He comes to offer Thomas a new dream, a new vision, a new understanding of Messiah. Touch. See. Believe. Which he does. And in that touch is life. In that seeing is vision. In that belief is purpose. But it not just the touching and the seeing. Jesus gives Thomas what he needs. Jesus gives Thomas himself. And so 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! Kyrios and Theos. At the last supper in John's Gospel, Jesus told Thomas that to know and see him is to know and see God. Now, at last, Thomas understands.

When I was a student at U of M, once upon a time in the days before cell phones, they used to have blue call boxes placed strategically around campus. If you picked up one of these, campus security would come to that location. I recall passing a call box one time with an “out of order” sign on it. Beneath the “out of order” someone had scrawled a handwritten note. It said: “keep running!” [based on an old joke, original source unknown].

Friends, don't keep running. Stop. Breathe deep. Get your bearings. Jesus Christ is the Lord, the master of creation, the giver of all we need. Jesus Christ is God, the author of love, the divine listener who hears and knows our every fear and dream and heartache. Breathe. Breathe again. Though we can't see what Thomas saw or touch what he touched, his story lives in us. Believing is seeing. Easter hope is not once and done. Easter hope is here for the long-haul. And even though we have no power over events and circumstances, we do have power to overcome fear, to rise above disillusionment, to trust and believe, to stop running and breathe. For Thomas, encountering the one who lived and died and lives again was life.

*Though I did not see his triumph over death; though I did not see him draw immortal breath;  
I know he lived and died and lives again for me; my faith is sure; I have not seen, yet I believe!*

Thanks be to God. Amen.

**“I Have Not Seen, Yet I Believe” by Sally DeFord**

*They heard his voice; they saw his face;  
The promised Savior come to earth in days long past.  
They saw him heal the sick and cause the lame to stand;  
They watched as wind and waves were stilled at his command.  
And though I did not see him calm the raging seas,  
His hand has calmed my troubled heart, and I believe.*

*They heard his voice; they saw his face;  
They heard his teachings of forgiveness, love and faith.  
He blessed their little ones; he taught them how to pray;  
He fed the multitudes who hungered by the way.  
And though I did not taste the bread he bade them eat,  
His word is manna to my soul, and I believe.*

*They saw him scourged and mocked to scorn;  
They heard the angry crowd; they saw him crowned with thorns;  
They watched him bend beneath our burden in the streets;  
They saw the bitter nails that pierced his hands and feet.  
And though I was not there to watch with them at Calvary,  
My spirit weeps; I have not seen, yet I believe.*

*They heard his voice; they saw his face;  
The risen Jesus, crowned with victory o'er the grave.  
And though I did not see his triumph over death;  
Though I did not see him draw immortal breath;  
I know he lived and died and lives again for me;  
My faith is sure; I have not seen, yet I believe!*