

Easter 2A April 19 2020
John 20:19-31
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
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Grace and peace to you from Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit, one true God, now and eternally. Amen. *'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." ... 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."* Let's pray: Father of faith and life, give us the strength to believe; help our unbelief. Amen.

Christ is risen, the tomb is empty, but the doors of the room are locked. Resurrected life doesn't happen easily.

One week ago, God rolled the stone away from the tomb. Death was defeated and Mary Magdalene saw Jesus alive. That night, despite Mary's good news, the disciples hid behind locked doors. Today, a week after the resurrection, the disciples are in the same room behind the same locked doors. Not much has changed. They have traded a stone-sealed tomb for a room with locked doors.

With hindsight, it's easy to make judgements about the integrity of the disciples, but are we really any different? Don't we cower in fear behind locked doors? God opens the tomb and we, hedging our bets, follow behind locking the doors just in case. God opens the tomb and declares forgiveness, and we continue to live behind the locked doors of self-condemnation and loathing. God opens the tomb and defeats death, but we continue to live like zombies. God opens the tomb and offers new life and a new way, but we lock the doors and shy away to the familiar past. God opens the tomb and declares that we are loved, and we lock ourselves behind doors of suspicion. The

locked doors of our lives are not so much about what is going on around us, but what is happening within us: fear, anger, guilt, hurt, grief, refusal to change. There're many locks on the doors of our life and they're always locked from the inside.

This is what Thomas is struggling with when he says, "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." That sentence has left Thomas forever dubbed, Doubting Thomas. We know that Thomas all too well. But there's another side to Thomas that we often overlook. That's the Thomas who wants to believe. That's the Thomas Jesus comes to in today's gospel.

This is a story about believing, not doubting. If nothing else, it tells us that resurrection is difficult to believe. It's not just an idea or a fact with which we agree. It's an incomprehensible mystery. It's a whole new way of being. If you don't struggle with what resurrection means, and how it plays out in your life, then please share your wisdom. You are indeed, a rare human being.

Thomas wears the label, but the other disciples' names are also written on it. They too, reveal the difficulty of believing. On the evening of the first day of the week, the day Jesus is resurrected, the disciples are hiding. God opens the tomb and they lock the doors. God empties the tomb and they fill the room. Jesus appears to them in their locked room. He speaks to them: "Peace be with you." He breathes life into them: "Receive the Holy Spirit." A week later they're still in the same room, behind the same locked doors. Nothing has changed.

Despite how we've labelled him, Thomas isn't doubting. He's struggling with how to believe and what to believe in. It's the shared struggle of all of humanity. Thomas wants to see and touch for only one reason. So that he too might believe. I think there's something faithful and authentic about that.

How about you? What do you believe about Jesus' resurrection? What do you want to believe about Jesus' resurrection? What gets in the way? What makes it difficult to believe? How are you wrestling and struggling with the resurrection of Jesus in your life?

I ask, because I have more questions than answers myself. I want to believe that Jesus' resurrection offers peace and life, but I see wars around the world, children dying from starvation, people I love battling disease, domestic violence, and broken relationships. I want to believe that Jesus' resurrection overcomes death but I still long to see my deceased family and friends. I want to believe that Jesus' resurrection is real but I don't see much difference between my life this week compared to the week before Easter. Most people are aware of the chasm that exists between what they "believe" and what they see and experience.

It's not that hard to get to the same place as Thomas. I do, often. Unless I see wars cease, poverty eradicated, people healed, harmony in homes, and relationships reconciled, I will not believe. Unless I feel the presence of my loved ones, the tears drying up, and the pain subsiding, I will not believe. Unless I experience some measurable difference in my life, I will not believe.

If we're honest with ourselves, we'll acknowledge that we're no different to Thomas. Everyone has at least one "unless" clause. Unless I see, unless I touch, unless I feel, unless I experience, I will not believe. It reveals our struggle and desire to believe. It also reveals our misunderstanding of faith and the resurrection.

We struggle because we condition the resurrection of Jesus on the reliability of evidence rather than the power of God. Each condition becomes another lock on the door. It can't keep Jesus out but it can keep us trapped inside long enough to turn our house into our tomb.

The resurrection of Christ doesn't meet our conditions. Instead, it empowers and enables us to unlock the door and step outside even when we don't know what's on the other side.

The resurrection doesn't end wars. Rather, it reveals the sanctity and dignity of life so that we might be emboldened to speak and work for "justice, freedom, and peace." It's the compassion behind the tears we weep and the prayers we offer for all who are victims of "hunger, fear, injustice, and oppression."

The resurrection doesn't wave a wand and fix relationships. It's the energy and perseverance behind our work to reconcile relationships and resolve conflict. It's the power by which we love our neighbour as ourselves. It's the power by which we love our enemies.

The resurrection doesn't eliminate our pain or tears over the death of our loved ones. It's the "strength to meet each day with determination, resilience, and patience; not mournful like those without hope but in thankful remembrance of [God's] great goodness, and in the joyful expectation of eternal life with those we love."

The resurrection doesn't measure KPIs [Key Performance Indicators]. It guarantees our life and our future with God.

Resurrection isn't a concept to be grasped or a case to be proven. Resurrection is a life to be lived. Every time we live in the power of the resurrection, we engage the world, one another, and our life in a new way. We move from saying, "Unless I see...", to saying, "My Lord and my God."

Resurrected people know that faith and life are messy. They ask hard questions rather than accepting easy answers. They don't have to figure it all out before saying their prayers, feeding the hungry, forgiving themselves and others, or loving their neighbour. They trust that what God believes about them is more important than what they believe about God. Resurrected people are willing to get out of the house. They unlock doors even when they don't know what's on the other side. They believe even if they don't understand. They may never see or touch Jesus, but they live trusting that they have been seen and touched by him.

Resurrected people believe that, '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 [eternal] life in his name' (John 20:30-31). God bless and protect you that you may come to believe and have eternal life in his precious name. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.