

John 20:19-31

We are bombarded with so much information in our day that we need to discern what is false news, misinformation, and phishing scams from what is true. I have been targeted as a sender of phishing scams when a false email asking people to send gift cards for a specific need was sent from my church email address. Thankfully a wise person contacted the office directly to verify this request and an email was sent from the church office advising people to ignore and if possible, to report the phishing scam.

Misinformation abounds when half-truths are believed. The current dispute in the United Methodist Church is purported to be about gay pastors and gay marriages, when the true basis of the disagreement is that many clergy, including those at the very top of the organization, refuse to follow the established book of rules called the Discipline that all clergy of the United Methodist denomination take an oath to follow. Another possible source of misinformation could have been when Bill said to me yesterday, "You've got to hear this... a man was bitten by an alligator yesterday in Titusville." Considering an alligator that large roaming loose in Titusville, PA I randomly asked, "Is that Titusville, FL?" Bill read the actual article and, yes, it happened in Florida.

I believe the most famous dealing with fake news in American history is when H. G. Wells "The War of the Worlds" was aired on a 1938 radio broadcast causing mass panic even though the broadcast was often interrupted with messages that it was an enactment of a science fiction book. I'm sure there is a lot of false news you can think of in this day and age that doesn't go back that far, but the point of all this is that we need to verify what we hear that may sound a little suspicious. We need to have a healthy doubt.

Many people have referred to the apostle Thomas as "Doubting Thomas" because of the proof he required to believe that Jesus had actually come to visit the disciples on the day of his resurrection. Thomas, whom the gospel refers to as "the twin", although never actually identifies his twin, was one of the most loyal of disciples. He was the one who, when Jesus determined he would be going to Bethany after Lazarus' death, declared, "We will all go with you and die with you."

We know that the disciples didn't physically die when Jesus was crucified; the majority of them went into hiding. Only John was present at the crucifixion scene as far as we know because from the cross Jesus put his mother's care into John's hands. Now, at the beginning of today's reading they are gathered together with the doors barred in fear that the Roman or religious authorities would come punish them as followers of Jesus. For some reason Thomas isn't with them. Jesus shows the disciples the wounds in his hands and his side; it was then that the disciples rejoiced that Jesus was alive. It sounds as though they, too, needed proof this was Jesus standing there among them. We don't know why Thomas said he needed to put his hands into Jesus' wounds to believe that Jesus was alive, there are some people who are, by nature, very suspicious. Thomas happened to be one of those people, and that's not a bad thing. If we don't investigate some of the things we hear we can be scammed out of a lot of money, we can be tricked into doing things that are not legal, we can follow false prophets, and on and on... being a bit suspicious is a good trait.

Thomas had his suspicions refuted when Jesus again appeared to the disciples. It was a full week after his resurrection that Jesus returned to the disciples who were still gathered in a closed room. Thomas was with the disciples on that day and without him even having to ask,

Jesus told Thomas to place his hands into the wounds so he could know the truth of the resurrected Christ.

You may have heard me say that the pastor who confirmed me, Pastor Soccor, told my confirmation class that having doubt is not bad, that having doubt will strengthen your faith. It took me many years to understand that statement, to realize that when you look for proof of reasons why you believe, you find more than enough information to trust your belief in the triune God. Part of doing this is to keep your eyes open to small resurrections.

It can be said that the disciples themselves received a small rebirth the day Jesus came to them. After his death the disciples may have stopped believing in Jesus. For three days they were left to think that they had wasted the last 3 years of their lives following someone who was not who they thought he was, even though they had witnessed him fulfilling all the prophecies of the Messiah in their sight. Now, with his second appearance they had proof that their beliefs were real. Now they had a mission to forgive people. They had a mission to spread the word about Jesus to others so others can believe without seeing for themselves. They could go on living without fear.

We see rebirth each spring when we watch the trees sprout new leaves, and flowers blossom without our prompting. They know that with the change in temperature it is time to reappear. We see rebirth when a person who was addicted to drugs, alcohol, video games or anything else that is holding them captive works through their addiction to living a healthier life. We see rebirth when we re-affirm the vows our parents took at our baptism and state for ourselves that we believe in God's love, and we will seek to live by that faith.

As we continue to grow in God's love and delve deeper into the Bible and Christian teachings we discover for ourselves the truth that is found when we live our lives following what Jesus taught: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

We have a lot of information bombarding us these days, some of it untrue, but we can believe that the love of God is real, that Jesus lived, died, and rose again to defeat death, and that the Holy Spirit lives and rules in the lives of those who choose to listen.

All glory be to God.