

First Baptist Church of Fitchburg

1400 John Fitch Highway Fitchburg, MA 01420 Phone# 978-345-5622

April 19, 2020, 2nd Sunday of Easter

Pastor: Rev. Meredith H. Christian Song Leader: May Goff



Welcome and Announcements:

Good morning congregation, on this joyous Sunday. Thank you for joining our community service as we come into covenant with each other in the presence of Almighty God to celebrate His many blessings, and bring before us your deep concerns.

I thank each of you for having shared your time, talents, and resources with each other and this ministry, and for your continued prayers for each other, and all those affected by sickness, anxiety and distress around the world.

Please feel welcome to share concerns and celebrations with me and your deacons, who will forward them to myself directly. My email is meredithhchristian@gmail.com and phone is (774) 276-0505.

Let us unite in our Call to Worship.

***Call to Worship** (in unison)

The followers of Jesus who gathered in the upper room following the resurrection of Christ were a diverse group—including fishermen and tax collectors, liberals and conservatives, some who were absolutely confident of their faith and some who were not so sure. We, too, are a diverse group with various personalities, talents, passions, vocations, and levels of confidence, and we, just like those early followers, gather to celebrate the risen Christ.

Invocation:

Even though we have made a commitment to You God, and have confessed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we acknowledge that the pathway of faith has at times been bumpy. We have sometimes questioned, doubted, and even at times rebelled against Your Word, but we know that You alone are our hope and salvation, and that we can turn to no one else. So we come this morning in a spirit of worship and expectation, inviting You into our struggles and trusting in Your Spirit, and mercy and grace, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Gloria Patri:

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be
world without end. Amen, Amen.*

Hymn: "He Lives" (Hold Ctrl key and Click on link->) <https://youtu.be/4M-zwE33zHA>

First Reading: *Psalm 16 (ESV)*

"Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you." As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight. The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips.

The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore”

Celebrations and Concerns:

In celebration for new birth, new jobs and new friends, and in sympathy for those who are overwhelmed, under budget, or feeling loss, we pray to the Lord in agreement with one another in the name of Jesus.

Silent Prayer:

(Please join me in a moment of silent prayer for all those who have died this week, no matter the cause.)

Pastoral Prayer:

Hear our prayer, O Lord, for the needs of our friends, neighbors, and loved ones, and for those who have received alarming news about their state of health.

We pray for parents who may be concerned about the choices their children are making, or whose children are struggling in school amidst these new challenges in learning, and for the elderly who may be finding it increasingly difficult to retain the skills for everyday living in solitude.

We earnestly pray for all who are facing crisis at work, or because of lack of work, and for each person attempting to combat depression or lack of self-esteem. We pray that Your Spirit continue to remind them of who they are in You, Lord Jesus, and reveal to them those things You find beautiful and pleasing in them as we pray the prayer You taught us to pray,

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Children's Message: (Offered by Debi Cross)



Don't Miss Church!

I like Top Ten lists. You know, those lists like "The Top Ten Songs of the Week" or "The Top Ten Movies of the Year." When your parents were choosing a name for you, they may have looked at a list of "The Top Ten Names for Boys and Girls." I guess there is a Top Ten list for just about everything you can imagine. I have a Top Ten list this morning that you may not have heard before. It is the "Top Ten Reasons NOT to miss church."

Every Sunday you have to decide whether you are going to get up and gather together in worship. Well, here is a list of the Top Ten Reasons NOT to miss church when, and as you are able. Maybe it will help you to decide.

10. Chocolate covered donuts at Sunday School (Just kidding!)
9. Making long-lasting friendships
8. Singing praises to God
7. Hearing a good sermon by the pastor
6. Receiving encouragement from others and giving encouragement to others

5. Bible study
4. Praying for one another
3. Growing in our faith
2. Missing church makes it easier to miss the next week, and then the next

And the number one reason NOT to miss church is...

1. You are sure to miss something special that God has for YOU!

What could that something be? Well, our Bible lesson today might help us to find out.

It was the Sunday after Jesus was crucified and his disciples had gathered together in a locked room. They were together in that locked room because they were afraid. They were afraid of what Jesus' enemies might do to them. The Bible tells us that, even though the doors were locked, Jesus came in and stood there with his disciples. When the disciples saw Jesus, they were very happy.

One of the disciples, whose name was Thomas, was not there with the others in that room when Jesus appeared to them. I don't know why Thomas wasn't there. Perhaps he had gone fishing or maybe he just decided to stay at home that day. When the other disciples saw Thomas, they told him that they had seen Jesus, but he didn't believe them. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it," Thomas told them.

A week later the disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. The very same thing happened again. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among his disciples. He turned to Thomas and said, "See my hands; put your fingers here. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas didn't need to touch the wounds where the nails had been or put his hand into his side. He fell on his knees before Jesus and said, "My Lord and my God!"

Before Jesus returned to heaven to be with his Father, he told his disciples that when two or three are gathered together in his name, he would be there with them. Each week we come together in the name of Jesus to worship and to praise him. So, what really important thing do we miss out on if we don't come to church? We miss out on the same thing that Thomas missed out on—the chance to be with Jesus!

***Prayer:** Dear Jesus, we have come together and gathered in your name today because we want to be with you. We have come to worship and praise your name. Amen.*

Youth Message: (Offered by Catherine Robertson)

PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVING!

This week would normally have been your school vacation. Many towns have chosen not to hold Google Classroom or Zoom for the week. However, whether we have vacation or not, we always take God with us wherever we go! So, I'd like to offer you a **challenge** for this week!

FIRST: please continue with your "Go Forth" prayers for the 2 people you chose last week.

REFLECT: It's good to take a few minutes to think about your prayer experience last week.

So, how was your week of praying "GO Forth" – please think about the below....

?? Did you **feel** your prayers were heard by our Lord and Savior? _____
 Why/why not: _____

?? Was it hard for you? _____ Were you frustrated? _____ If so why? _____
 _____ If not, what was easy? _____

?? Were you able to pray every day of the week? _____ or if not, why not?

?? Did you choose more than two people to pray for? _____

?? Did you add anyone as you went along? _____ {Hooray if you did!}

?? Do you think that the Lord did a work in you during the week? _____
If so, what changed in you? _____

?? Do you feel that as you prayed for the person(s) during the week, that you came to think of them differently? _____

?? What else did you think/feel about the prayer this week? Lift it up to the Lord.

Share your feelings with Jesus! **Remember**, He prayed for you. You are always on

His mind! Jesus wants to hear your heart prayers, please reflect and share your prayers with our Savior.....

SECOND: Please pray for those people again this week! You can do it! Let the angels rejoice!
See Luke 15:10!

THIRD: Here's a question for the challenge:

What if you woke up today with only what you thanked the Lord for yesterday?

Hmmmm? How does that make you feel???

Praying and praising the Lord go together.

The more we are aware of the blessings the Lord pours into our lives,
the more we feel loved by the Lord!

The more we feel loved by the Lord,
the more we want to tell others about Jesus and what He did for us!

HERE'S THE CHALLENGE! Consider thanking/praising the Lord for **5** (FIVE) things before you fall off to sleep every night this week! It's a good way to go to sleep because it opens your mind to the workings of the Holy Spirit in you *while* you sleep. You will be resting in the Lord.

How to do this? Name Five, (**5**) **different** blessings every night! From today, through next Sunday.

Is this a "Wait! What?" moment for you???

Let me offer a few thoughts that may help you.....

- Blessings are, of course, family and friends, food and shelter, health and safety.
- Blessings are also the song of a bird or a glimpse of a butterfly that captures your attention.
- Or, seeing God's majesty in a sunrise/sunset or a flower popping up in the middle of rubble, or being excited by the fun colors of creation....like the orange legs on a duck!
- There are also unexpected blessings of an encouraging word from a stranger or a surprise call/text from someone you haven't seen in a while, or a Scripture thought that comes to you.
- Blessings are both large and small. Sometimes the small ones are more powerful!
- AND - We ourselves can be a blessing to someone! That counts as a blessing for us too!
- Sometimes a blessing is given to us in terms of something not happening. Think about that!

CLOSING THOUGHT: Our prayers are stronger when we are more in aware of the blessings of the Lord: (a) We more easily see God in the world around us; (b) we more clearly see people as Jesus sees them, (c) and we are changed.....and

spiritually lean into the workings of the Holy Spirit in us. God is a multi-tasker!! Praising the Lord is such a significant practice for us to do! It's not hard! Have joy! We simply bless the Lord by acknowledging God's amazing love.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His Holy Name!"

[Psalm 103]

Blessing of the Tithes and Offerings:

We offer these tithes, offerings and gifts to You Lord as a pledge to aspire to always be steady and faithful in what we do and give for You, and as a sign of our confidence that nothing we do for You is in vain, as we share with Your church Body, in gratitude, from the abundance of the blessings You have bestowed upon us.

(Tithes, offerings and gifts are greatly appreciated as a means to continue to care for our facilities, the needs of each other, and our local and worldwide community. We thank you for your pledges at this time and ask that you Please Pray over your gifts and mail them to, **Linda Gosselin 10 Washington Street, Fitchburg MA 01420**).

Doxology:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow

Praise Him all creatures here below

Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts

Praise Father Son and Holy Ghost.

Choir Song: *"Wonderful Peace"* (Hold down Ctrl key and Click on link) https://youtu.be/anaHt_V3hvo

Sermon Text: *John 20:19-31* (NRSV)

"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 continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

"Seeing It Through"

What a strange time this is. Over the past month I have seen so many things that I have never seen before, even things that I would have thought impossible two months ago. Perhaps some of you are thinking the same thing right now as you read this at home this Sunday morning. If I were not living through this, if someone had come to me earlier and predicted this would happen, I wonder if I would have believed that the entire country would have been shut down for Lent. I am sure I am not the only one. Some of us have to see things happen in a way that aligns with what we know in order to believe that something positive could occur, and then there are others who simply say that God can do what He wants and expect to be amazed whenever God feels like showing up.

I find myself wondering which type of person I really am as I read through today's scripture. After all, it was Sunday morning and the church was locked inside a house in fear, yet God was with them (v.19), just as He is here with me now as I type this out. I remember from earlier Bible readings that Jesus had said to the disciples before His walk to the cross that they would see Him again, rejoice and that no one would be able to take their joy from them after that (*John 16:22*), which was evident by the joy they experienced as each of the people in that room held onto their joy and faith in Jesus for the rest of their lives, no matter the struggles and suffering they experienced for the sake of the testimony of Jesus Christ.

This wasn't some sort of fool's joy, the type of whimsical giddiness that laughs in spite of a traumatic event, as some sort of frightened release. No, this was the type of Joy that comes from having peace in your heart regardless of the outward circumstances because you know that you know that this situation is temporary, that God is in control, and that no matter the situation, you are the beloved of the Most High God.

Of course the people in that room were not feeling peaceful or joyous in that moment, or they would not have been huddled in a locked room. It was only after God revealed Himself to them in a personal way that they recognized it was their friend Jesus (v.20). Jesus offered them peace, and then said that He was going to send them forth, just as His Father had sent Him (v.21), and they would not be sent out alone.

They were given the Holy Spirit, breathed on them (v.22), just as God had breathed His Spirit on first man, Adam. It would be the Spirit of God on them, and then later in them after the day of Pentecost that would allow them to go forth in the same miraculous power as Jesus and perform miraculous things like healing the sick and casting out demons in His name.

Remember when Jesus had previously said to them that He would give Peter and His church the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and that whatever they would bind on earth would be bound in heaven, and whatever they loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven (*Matthew 16:19*)? Jesus had told them that amazing things were about to happen, but at the time they couldn't see what He was talking about.

Now Jesus, after having given them His Spirit, said He was giving them ability to forgive sin, which was a right that belonged to God alone. He also said that if the disciples chose to retain the sins of another, then those sins would be retained by them; by the unforgiven disciple (v.23), so for those who held onto what others did wrong, those wrongdoings would be held on to by the one who refused to forgive and trust God to handle it.

Jesus had asked them to forgive so many times, because forgiving another person and letting go of what they said or did is a sign of the belief that it is Jesus alone who has been, "appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead (*Acts 10:42*), and that the Father, "has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (*Acts 17:31*). The point of forgiving an offence was not to say that what happened did not matter or was acceptable, but to trust in the judgement and timing of God to handle the situation in a fair, just and perfect way based on His ability to fully understand the situation. Forgiveness is faith in action.

Then, just after Jesus talked about trust and left, in came Thomas, late to the party. He was too late to see what his friends had witnessed for himself and when his friends told them what he had missed, Thomas failed to believe them and decided instead to judge for himself, based on his own experience. (vs.24-25). Thankfully, one week later, Jesus came back, and this time Thomas was present.

Again, the first thing Jesus did was offer them His peace (v.26), and then Jesus acknowledged Thomas' unbelief (v.27), without condemning him, or calling Thomas ungrateful, disappointing or weak. This is one of my favorite parts of this reading, because it gives me comfort to know that God loves analytical thinkers like me. Jesus did not embarrass Thomas or say He was disappointed in him. There was no comment of "Really?" or teasing. Jesus just offered the twin what he needed in that moment, and for Thomas, that was enough. It was then, in Jesus' patience that he recognized Jesus and acknowledged Him as Lord and God (v.28).

It is clear by His words that Jesus understood that some have to see to believe. There would be others to follow who would not bear witness to the physical manifestation of Jesus in this lifetime, yet by reading of the Gospel accounts or hearing of them from another proclaiming the miracles of Jesus they would believe. (v.29). Here we are Christians, people of the faith and God is still confounding some of us. We have just near finished one of the warmest New England winters on record, and I woke up to snow yesterday morning.

The news said something about some bad weather coming, but I didn't believe I was going to be looking at 5 inches of powder on my lawn that morning. I just didn't want to believe its not spring yet. All the signs were there. The only joy I took in the experience was watching the look on my niece's face when she looked out the window and tried to make sense of it all. Her experience of living all those years in Louisiana has told her that the flowers and warm weather was an indication of sunny days to come. We didn't see this coming.

Peter wrote that even though we Christians have not seen Jesus, we love Him, and even though we do not see Him now with our own eyes, we still believe in Him, our faith in Him brings us that joy Jesus was talking about, and we are in receipt of that end result of our faith; not only the presence of our friend Jesus in our daily lives, and the gifts of the Spirit as they manifest in our lives, and through us into the lives of others, but also we are assured of the salvation of our souls (*1 Peter 1:8-9*), after this life in eternity with Christ.

Our assurance is based on the evidence of what He allowed His first followers to see and touch and experience. They wrote down those experiences so that we would know what happened, what is going to happen, and so that we could in some way be prepared for the unexpected things to come.

There is a part of this scripture that I know some find downright irritating, "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written" (v.30), for us to read. Who knows what other astounding and bizarre things those first century believers witnessed that they may have omitted thinking that no one would believe what they were saying if they told people about *that detail*. The Bible then says that the reason why these particular miracles, signs and wonders *were* written and repeated was, "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" (v.30).

An often quoted observation, "We don't see the things the way they are. We see things the way *we* are." (*The Talmud*). This may be why these same followers of Christ, after having witnessed Jesus perform so many miracles walked away and why others were able to accept the sight of Him walking through a locked door and standing before them. Perhaps they were not able to see through their own experiences the Miracle before them.

How many of them had seen Jesus turn water into wine at Cana (*John 2:1-11*), or heal Peter's mother-in-law from a fever (*Mark 1:29-31*), or cleanse a man from leprosy (*Luke 5:12-14*), or seen a man lowered from a roof and walk out with his mat in hand (*Matthew 9:1-8*), or calm the sea (*Mark 4:35-41*), feed the multitude (*John 6:1-15*), walk across the water (*Mark 6:45-52*), kill a tree with a word (*Mark 11:12-14*), or re-attach a mans severed ear (*Luke 22:50-51*)?

These are just a few of the miraculous things that these people had witnessed for themselves or been told from others who saw them with their own eyes, so Jesus standing before them alive and in a new body that bore those newly nail-scarred hands was evidence that Jesus would see them through this new struggle to find a way to stay safe and go on with His ministry, this new Way, after Jesus' death.

This was a sign that something different had happened, different than anything they had ever seen before, and the people in that room believed that the same God who had walked with them in the flesh and performed all those other miracles, was standing with them now. And why not? Was anything too difficult for God (*Jeremiah 32:27*)?

So here we are Christians, still looking for a new way to stay safe in what looks like an insurmountable struggle and somehow go on with His ministry until He returns. The good news is, we are not left to figure this out on our own. Our job is to believe; to have faith that the same God who parted the sea (*Exodus 14:21*), and stopped the sun (*Joshua 10:13*), is moving mountains for us even now.

Some of you may find it irritating to see so many scripture references breaking up this message, but they are there to set before your eyes what God *has* done and *is willing* to do for His children and indeed for all people.

The same God who walked with Israel, the same Jesus who walked with those disciples, the same Spirit who works in and through us is still able and willing to intervene in amazing ways that we cannot yet imagine. All He has ever asked of us is that we have faith in Him and that we believe in His love and faithfulness enough to call on Him in our times of need and trust in Him even when all hope looks lost.

Do you have to see things happen in the way you expect in order to believe that good things are in store for you, or do you have faith to believe that God can do something unexpected and miraculous at any moment? I pray that you remain hopeful in the sight of these circumstances. I pray that you encourage yourself just as King David once did when everything looked hopeless and he was feeling utterly defeated (1 Samuel 30:6). I pray you will look back on the scriptures listed here and remember the Lord's goodness and find moments of Joy in your present condition, while the Church waits, locked away, for Jesus to disrupt this pandemic, intervene in our current condition and offer peace to this situation. I have faith that He will and I believe that we will again go forth in love, and in faith believing, I continue to pray for each of you until we are together again.

Hymn: *"Thine Be The Glory"* (Hold down Ctrl key and Click on link.->) <https://youtu.be/CorLsVVhcW4>

Benediction: Now may each of you go forth throughout this week in confidence, knowing that you are secure in God's embrace. Go forth in joy, knowing that God loves you, and go forth in hope, made secure by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen.

May the Lord bless and keep you all.

