

“Peace be With You”

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a 501c3 non-profit food pantry and community development in Overland, MO.

John 20:19-31

The story of doubting Thomas always comes the Sunday after Easter. I think it is good to have such a character in the Bible who isn't quite sure what to make of such unbelievable happenings: death from life, a living breathing person who was dead- with holes in his body- not asleep or having a heart arrhythmia or seizure or something temporary- but dead. 3 days dead to make sure he was dead. So it is curious to me why people put Thomas down as an unbeliever....he simply is asking how this happened and wanting to understand- like all of us who are seekers of God in our lives.

Today's story tells again the story of resurrection, Mary in the garden and then Jesus appearing to the disciples in the upper room with Thomas there this time, seeking truth. Let us all always seek truth in our lives!

Listen for God's Word to you in the gospel of John 20:19-31 in the NRSV:

John 20 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Resurrection of Jesus

“20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord

out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there,⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look^[a] into the tomb;¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew,^[b] “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher).¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

¹⁹ 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.” 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.”

Jesus and Thomas

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin^[c]), 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.”

The Purpose of This Book

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe^[d] that Jesus is the Messiah, ^[e] the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

This is the Word of God; thanks be to God.”

There are two points to this reading that jump out at me today. One is that Jesus repeatedly tells them “Peace”- three times. And the other is that when you believe in Jesus you have life in his name.

Peace is something that we all need-everyday. Especially when there is uncertainty, anxiety, anger and loss- peace is the thing that we thirst for. The main thing that we don’t have. Imagine the disciples in this time: their leader has been cruelly killed and mocked publicly in this killing for all to see. Not what they expected of God’s son! Imagine their fear for their lives- that they would be next! No wonder they were hiding petrified and unable to grasp the truth that Jesus brought.

Jesus understands their need. He tells them 3 times, “Peace”.

Comfort and presence are what we need when times are tough. When I was a hospital chaplain, I knew every nook and cranny in the entire hospital that had Kleenex and bottles of water- for they were the only things I needed besides my presence and perhaps a few words and hugs and mostly listening to people in grief and loss and anger. Peace and presence. You all have that no matter what happens to each of you or to all of you.

Believing in Jesus means that we follow his ways and know that he is in us. Jesus said when we believe in him, we have life in his name. We are given power to live the countercultural life of caring for the least of these-actually- this is a spiritual practice when we help the poor and are changed by that interaction! We follow Jesus when we share what we have, and pardon ourselves and each other, and have hope that a way will be revealed when we see no way.

Kayla McClurg, in her Sunday words on Inward/Outward-a church in Washington DC, shares some thoughts about the believing in Jesus and what the resurrection means. She asks: “What does it mean to trust the evidence of what we cannot see? Is the resurrection real and with us now in this dear despairing world? Maybe in any act where hope triumphs over hate, kindness stands up to bigotry and loving action conquers anger and shame, we are seeing resurrection. Maybe resurrection is what we are seeing when Mexican artist Pedro Reyes melts down confiscated gang weapons to make musical instruments and shovels for the planting of trees. Maybe we are witnessing resurrection in the story of Ronald Cotton, wrongly convicted of rape and sentenced to life in prison, and then exonerated after years behind bars. Instead of harboring hatred and fantasies of revenge, he chose to forgive the woman who accused him and even to build a friendship. Today they work together on behalf of others who also have been wrongly accused.

Once we see evidence like this, how can we not believe? To believe is to bear witness to hope rising to choose life, and again life, over death. We do not need to manufacture proof that Jesus is among us. We only need resurrection eyes to see him already in our midst.”¹

My prayer for this congregation is that you will sense that way for your future after I am gone. I know you will have folks to help you and most of all you will have the Holy Spirit to guide you and to be with you in it.

God is with you:

Peace be with you all. Amen.

¹ Kayla McClurg, Inward/outward a project of the Church of the Saviour, Washington DC.
<http://inward/outward.org>