

Willow River Parish—Clear Lake, Deer Park, Forest United Methodist

John 20:19-31

It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” After He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.” Then He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you don’t forgive them, they aren’t forgiven.”

Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn’t with the disciples when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, “We’ve seen the Lord!”

But he replied, “Unless I see the nail marks in His hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into His side, I won’t believe.”

After eight days His disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” Then He said to Thomas, “Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!”

Thomas responded to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus replied, “Do you believe because you see me? Happy are those who don’t see and yet believe.”

Then Jesus did many other miraculous signs in His disciples' presence, signs that aren't recorded in this scroll. But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and that believing, you will have life in His name.

1. One Question

What is the one phrase that nobody likes to hear, but everybody likes to say? The phrase is, "I told you so." When someone doesn't listen to us, they ignore our advice and get themselves in trouble, we are quick to say, "I told you so." But we absolutely hate it when others are right, and they throw those words at us.

One great "I told you so" story comes from Australia. Dr. Barry Marshall was an internist who saw many of his patients suffer with, and even die from, peptic ulcers. In some cases, the patients had their stomachs removed completely. In others, the peptic ulcers turned into stomach cancer. The medical establishment in Australia believed, as did doctors in our country, that ulcers were caused primarily by stress, and so their best treatments involved antacids and stress relief techniques. But Marshall and his colleague, Dr. Robin Warren, had done research that led them to believe that ulcers were caused by a common and easily-treated stomach bacteria.

They wrote papers on their research, but the first few medical journals they approached refused to publish them. When they finally did get published, no major medical institutions paid

attention. They couldn't get foundations to fund their research. Pharmaceutical companies actively opposed their research because these companies were making high profits off their antacid sales.

Drs. Marshall and Warren were successfully healing patients' ulcers with antibiotics, and saving these patients from a lifetime of pain or early death. They couldn't get widespread acceptance for their methods. Until Dr. Marshall decided to take drastic action. He drank the bacteria himself. Within days, he was in horrible pain and vomiting frequently. He developed a peptic ulcer soon afterwards. Then he treated himself with a course of antibiotics and completely healed his ulcer. As a result, medical journals around the world began publishing their research. Dr. Barry Marshall and Dr. Robin Warren were awarded the 2005 Nobel Prize for Medicine. Today, peptic ulcers are easily treatable and stomach cancer is rare in the Western world. All because one doctor decided to make himself sick to offer the world a cure. He could certainly have said "I told you so" to many of his colleagues worldwide.

2. **Easter**

Last Sunday, we celebrated Easter, the most important day of the Christian year, and the most joyful. There is no news that can compare to the message that Jesus rose from the dead. So why aren't we more excited?

The peace that Jesus promises His followers is not based on our circumstances or our comfort or our confidence in our own abilities. Jesus' peace comes from our knowledge of God's unfailing love and God's plan for the world. Jesus' peace comes from knowing the end of the story: that God plans to redeem all of creation and undo the destruction and distance caused by our sin and separation from Him. That's the peace that Jesus is offering to His disciples then, and that he offers to us now.

3. Thomas

In our Gospel reading, the disciples are together in a locked room. They are afraid that the Jewish authorities might arrest them and kill them, just as they had done to Jesus. Suddenly, Jesus appears among them. He says, "Peace be with you." The first thing Jesus does is give them that peace that comes from God. He tells them that He is sending them, just as God sent Him. He tells them to receive the Holy Spirit.

Thomas was the one disciple not present that day. The disciples try to tell him that they had seen Jesus. Thomas demands to see the evidence, see the wounds.

A week later, the disciples are again in a locked room. Thomas is with them. Jesus once again appears to them and gives them peace. He then turns to Thomas and tells him to put his fingers in the wounds. Thomas does not need to. Just seeing Jesus causes him to say, "My Lord and my God." Jesus tells Thomas that those

who don't see and believe are happy. That is all disciples today. We do not see, and yet are happy. We are blessed because of our belief.

4. **Doubt**

Several miles outside of the city of what is today Chennai, India, lies a sacred memorial called the Saint Thomas Mount. It is the traditional place where Thomas the disciple was martyred after having journeyed there to plant one of the early churches and spread the good news of Jesus Christ. The courage it took to journey so far from home and to sow seeds of the gospel in what is today southeastern India must have required great faith.

Doubt is often seen as the opposite of faith. We see that doubt can be a pathway that opens up and ultimately leads to great faith. Just one week after we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, we are faced with the timeless story of "Doubting Thomas." Jesus appears to His disciples, and they get to see physical proof of his resurrection. Thomas asks to see proof because he wasn't there. He seems to be chastised by Jesus, and branded as a doubter.

If we look closer, we see that in fact it is about the reader and not Thomas himself. Like Thomas, the reader will not have had a physical encounter with Jesus, nor will they have an exhaustive memoir of His life. What the reader has is the gospel, the story of the good news of God through the life, teaching, death, and

resurrection of Jesus Christ. The reader or hearer of the gospel fills their faith because they believe without the need to see.

This Easter season, we are witnesses to the resurrection power of God's love.

5. **Apostles of Hope**

If you want to stay out of the rain, you need to invest in an umbrella. So the saying might go. In our world right now, if you want to stay clear of the "cloud," you need to wear your mask. For what you can't see, CAN hurt you!

We can't see it—We can't feel it—We can't hear it—we can't touch it.

And yet, we cower in our homes for fear of the viral invader we call COVID-19.

The invisible "force" is changing the world, changing the way we do life, changing people—not necessarily all for the worse.

This past week, Saturday night Live put on a show that was completely virtual. So did Jimmy Fallon, Jimmy Kimmel and Stephen Colbert. Filmed from their homes, hosts and guests played music, interviewed, did skits, and bantered with each other, even about COVID-19. Far from getting us down, COVID-19 seems to be bringing out our best creativity, our innovative edge. Despite fears and deaths and dangers, the grief and the sadness

of losing friends and family, those with a voice keep on singing, inspiring hope in others. This is the human spirit at its best and greatest.

In a sense, these comedians and television personalities are “apostles of hope.” They feel a mission to uplift, to entertain, to laugh in the face of danger, to encourage others hiding in their homes that we can still giggle, that we can still love, that despite anything that happens to us, we cannot be defeated.

In fact, if anything, the challenges of loss and grief can unite us, can energize us to fight back with the best within us, can encourage us to reach out to others in unprecedented ways, can bring out in us that deeply embedded sense of what it means to be human and one global people.

6. Shalom

When Jesus appeared to the disciples, His greeting was, “Peace be unto you.” The Hebrew word Shalom, for “peace,” is a most comprehensive word. It covers the full realm of relationships in daily life and expressing an ideal state of life. The word suggests the fullness of well-being and harmony untouched by ill fortune. The word as a blessing is a prayer for the best that God can give to enable a person to complete one’s life with happiness and a natural death. If the concept of shalom became all too casual and light-hearted with no more significance than a passing greeting, Jesus came to give it new meaning. At Bethlehem God announced

that peace would come through the gift of God's unique Son. The mission and ministry of our Lord made it quite clear that Jesus had come to introduce the rule of God and to order peace for the world.

7. **Rescued**

Several years ago, the Saturday Evening Post ran a cartoon showing a man about to be rescued after he had spent a long time ship-wrecked on a tiny, deserted island. The sailor in charge of the rescue team stepped onto the beach and handed the man a stack of newspapers. The sailor said, "Compliments of the Captain. He would like you to glance at the headlines to see if you'd still like to be rescued!"

Sometimes the headlines do scare us. Sometimes we feel that evil is winning. Then Easter comes to remind us that there is no grave deep enough, no seal imposing enough, no stone heavy enough, no evil strong enough to keep Christ in the grave.