A photograph of a church interior, showing rows of wooden pews facing a sanctuary. The sanctuary features a large, colorful stained glass window and a wooden altar. The ceiling is made of exposed wooden beams with several pendant lights hanging from it. The overall atmosphere is warm and inviting.

APRIL 15, 2020

AGAPE FROM AFAR

Adjusting to life amidst Coronavirus

A WORD
FROM
PASTOR
JILL

As a way to remain connected during this time apart, I will be putting together a weekly newsletter with a reflection based on the upcoming Sunday scripture passage. I hope that by taking a few moments to reflect on the Word of God and pray, we can feel grounded and connected to God and to one another during this uncertain time. -*Pastor Jill*



After Jesus' crucifixion the disciples hid out in a locked room because they were afraid. Then out of nowhere the resurrected Jesus appears to them to comfort their fears and offer peace. But the disciple Thomas wasn't there when Jesus showed up, so he had to wait to see Jesus and feel at peace. In this time of quarantine, we relate to the disciples being locked behind closed doors and feeling afraid. We also relate to Thomas being confused and unable to see Jesus. Despite all the fear and confusion surrounding us, may we find a moment to hear Jesus' words, "Peace be with you."

Take some time to reflect on John 20:19-31 on the following pages.



Read the passage:

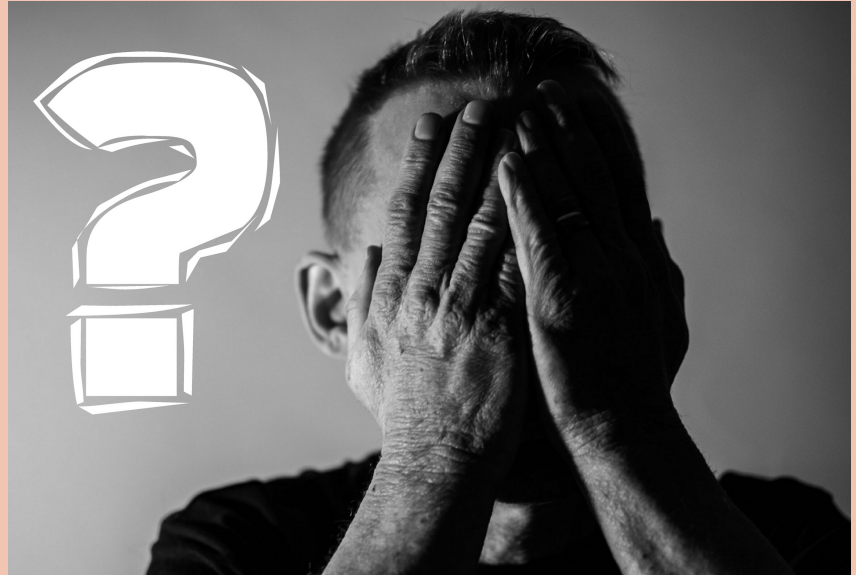
John 20:19-31

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



Reflect:

1. Thomas wasn't able to believe in Jesus' resurrection until he saw it for himself. When have you had a hard time believing something until you experienced it first-hand?
2. Jesus' post-resurrection message for his disciples could have been anything. Why do you think the first thing he said was, "Peace be with you"?
3. During this time of isolation, has anyone shown up to comfort you? When have you been able to feel God's peace?
4. What is this passage calling you to do today? This week?

Pray:

God, we continue to be anxious and afraid. We are impatient and want everything to get back to "normal." But we know that the "normal" we had was not a reflection of the Kingdom you desire. Help us to live our lives reflecting your peace, now and in the days and weeks to come. Amen.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF EASTER



On Easter this year instead of pews overflowing with families dressed in their Easter finest, the church was completely empty like the Easter tomb. An empty church makes it hard for it to feel like Easter, but it is a reminder that Jesus' presence cannot be contained in a tomb or in a church. New possibilities have sprung up because of this health crisis. Families and friends have connected in new ways, churches have reached people in their homes, and we all have new appreciation for essentials like toilet paper.

While we are grateful for the new possibilities, let us not forget that this health crisis is difficult for many—for those who do not have a safe place to shelter, for those who suffer from loneliness and depression, for those with fragile health, for those who cannot survive missing a paycheck, for those who must go to work so that the rest of us can stay home, for children and teachers navigating learning in different ways, for parents working from home while providing childcare.

As we go into the season of Eastertide (which lasts until May 31) let the empty tomb and church serve as a reminder that new life is possible, but we must continue to be the church caring for and providing hope for the community.

What I have been
reading:
Untamed by Glennon
Doyle

What I have been
Listening to:
Trolls World Tour
soundtrack

What I've been
watching:
The Repair Shop on
Netflix

**Please reach out to
staff if you have a
need. We continue
the work of caring
for one another by
meeting physical,
emotional and
spiritual needs.**

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