

A photograph of a church interior, showing rows of wooden pews facing a sanctuary. The sanctuary features a large, colorful stained glass window with abstract patterns. The ceiling is made of exposed wooden beams, and several pendant lights hang from it. The walls are decorated with garlands and small framed pictures. The overall atmosphere is warm and inviting.

APRIL 7, 2021

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*



The scripture for this week is from John 20:19-31. In this passage, Jesus appears to some of the disciples after the resurrection. One of the disciples, named Thomas, needs to see Jesus' scars for himself before he will believe. He has become known as Doubting Thomas, because of his lack of belief. While Thomas' doubt has been seen as a character flaw, his desire to see for himself and experience the risen Jesus is perfectly understandable. Once Thomas sees the risen Jesus for himself he responds, "My Lord and my God."

Reflect more on this passage 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. Jesus' first words to the disciples are "Peace be with you." Why do you think Jesus chose those words to "break the ice" at his first post-resurrection appearance?
2. Why do you think Thomas wanted to see Jesus for himself and not just believe what the other disciples told him?
3. What do you do with your own doubts or questions of faith and theology?
4. What is this passage calling you to do today? This week?

Pray:

Loving God, thank you for people like Thomas who ask the hard questions and seek more information. Give us the courage to admit our doubts while waiting for you to show up and say "Peace be with you". Amen.



Beginning this Sunday, April 11, fifty people (including staff & volunteers) may gather in the sanctuary, another 50 people may watch the service live-streamed in Hatfield Hall. Worship will continue to be available online to watch from home, or

Before Coming to In-person Worship:

1. If you have any symptoms or have been in close contact with someone with Covid within the last 14 days, we ask that you watch worship from home.
2. Sign up ahead of time on the online pew pad to assist with contact tracing. Everyone (including staff and volunteers) needs to register online (link emailed on Fridays), by phone (630-620-2630 x210), or in person on Sundays.
3. You may access the bulletin on your device ahead of time or print it out at home and bring it with you. The bulletin will also be on the screen.

Arriving at Worship:

1. Doors will open at 9:45. Plan to arrive by 10:10 so everyone may be seated.
2. You must wear a mask covering your mouth and nose.
3. You must sanitize your hands and have a temperature check before entering the building.
4. To maintain social distance, you will be directed when to enter the sanctuary or Hatfield Hall and will go directly to your seat and be seated.
5. Seating in the sanctuary and Hatfield Hall will be socially distanced and will be filled from the front to the back.
6. Members of the same household will be seated together.

During Worship:

1. Worship will be 30-40 minutes long.
2. Music will be instrumental and there will be no congregational singing.
4. Children will remain with their families or go directly to Sunday School.
5. Offering will be collected by the doors.
6. Worship responses will be call and response or viewable on the screen.
7. Dismissal at the end of the worship will be by household.
8. Restrooms will be available, but to maintain social distancing only one person may occupy the restroom at a time.

After worship:

1. Congregating in the building will not be permitted.
2. Weather permitting, outdoor coffee hour may be held.

We will continue to reassess and make adjustments as we determine how best to move forward. While worship will look different, we know that the Spirit of God will be present as we gather together in this new way and as many continue to join us virtually, too.