

“Life Finds a Way!”

John 20:19-31, April 19, 2020; 9:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

John 20:19-31 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

¹⁹When 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.” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Jesus and Thomas

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin^[a]), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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.”

²⁶A 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.” ²⁷Then 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.” ²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

A WEEK LATER

It was a week later. The week **after** the surprising day—that **Resurrection** Day. They were gathered again. *Virtually*. They were huddled in that Upper Room, some at a distance around the table. Some on Zoom.

They were *still* a mix of crazy **emotions**—even 7 days later. The week had started out in **discovery**, amazement, **surprise**, struggling to **believe** it could be **true**, wondering if they’d **dreamed** it all. It **continued** in great fear—all **mixed** up with great **joy**.

We left this **garden** last Sunday, this place of “*The Sermon Under the Mount*” as Matthew has named it! **We** also went out “*in fear and wonder and great joy*” all **mixed** up together. We enjoyed a **wonderful** time of **fellowship** on zoom coffee hour and the **kids** sent us “long distance **hugs**” and showed us their Easter baskets and **candy** loot. We **laughed** and shed a few tears—missing each other’s faces, **hugs** and warm **presence**.

We sent our “Delayed broadcast” out into the world via the internet and over 150 viewers “joined us” in worship! I felt great **joy** on that day, a **week** ago, as we **gathered**, and sang and lived the surprising and wondrous story of that amazing morning in the Garden, then and now.

As the **week** wore on, **though**, I became a little more like **Thomas**. Not that I didn’t **believe** Jesus had risen once again—*not* allowing **death** to have the final word—and that Jesus was walking **among** us, still in our midst, turning our fear to joy and hope. *Not* that the week wasn’t **also** filled with many messages of love, appreciation, concern and support for one another in our Beloved Community.

What came over my **heart** like a gray **cloud** and brought a sense of **foreboding** (not just because of the snowy, gray skies we had this week, though they *do* affect me at times, as I know they do many of you) was a sense of “collective **weeping**.”

The world is **weeping** and **worried**, and **wondering** where and how all this **pandemic** will **play** out. Where it will **leave** us as **humankind**? But even then, I realized that my deep disturbance of soul was *not* due to the **virus** itself—but to the discord, denial and destructive attitudes and behaviors of the **doubters**.

Protest marches, and emails and posts—declarations of defiance—resistance to the safety measures that our **leaders** have put in place to *try* to keep us safe—*try* to keep us from **harming ourselves**—**those** are the

“disturbances in the field” and my soul—and they are destroying the **fabric** of our common life!

God must **grieve** immensely when God’s children are so hell-bent on working at **cross**-purposes. At **refusing** to love our **neighbors**, fully. At the **callous** attitudes that say, “It’s not in *my* backyard; not affecting *my* family, or *my* financial security.” Why should I sacrifice *my* rights? Isn’t *that* more **important** than the **common** good?

DOUBTERS OF A DIFFERENT KIND?

The Doubters in our day are a *little* like Thomas, and a little different, as well. Do they doubt the danger is real, or maybe the **possibility** that we *can* work together and bring about the Good News? That there IS life after the Tomb; after the dark isolation and this limiting, shut down of progress?

I wonder what kind of **doubters** we would be? I wonder about the “rest of the gang?”

Did the other **disciples** also doubt, along with Thomas? When they tried to convince him—all week long—that they “**had seen the Lord**”—did they stop and wonder, along about Tuesday or Wednesday.....if *maybe* they’d been misinformed? If maybe the story from the **women** was “**fake news**?” That maybe all that **joy** and wonder and **hope** on Easter morning was just a momentary **pause** in the tumultuous **happenings** around them?

Did they **doubt** as much as Thomas that life could ever be joyful again? Wonder what the **proof** would be that Christ was living, loving and leading among them, and would change the world once and for all?

Doubt or question that it was truly up to *them* to carry that love on, right alongside Jesus?

HEADLINES of HOPE!

And then, as **I** was right there with the disciples, this week, doubting alongside Thomas that we would *ever* really live as **Easter people**, wallowing in the headlines that brought me to despair—signs of the ever-growing divisiveness and denial—*other* headlines began to appear!

Nature and human nature are *refusing* to be put down, once again! New life is NOT on lockdown anymore than Jesus is. Check out these headlines of hope!

First, a disclaimer: *My favorite* headline about swans and dolphins returning to the canals of Venice turned out to be more wishful thinking than fact. The pollution in the air in Italy *is* better, even if the water is not as clear and clean as first reported.

It's *also* true—and lovely! That folks are singing opera from their balconies—in Italy and others are doing street dances with their neighbors around the world. Look it up! That will lift your spirits. We've been howling in Buena Vista—maybe it's time to get our neighbors out to dance in the streets as well!

***Himalayas Visible for First Time in 30 years as pollution levels in India Drop**

As the lockdown to stop the spread of coronavirus in India continues, pollution levels across much of the country have dropped sharply. Now some residents in northern India say they can see the snow-capped Himalayas 200 kilometres away for the first time in 30 years.

“Mesmerizing, amazing, massive, surprising, never-before.”

PLANETS VISIBLE AS NEVER BEFORE! Lining up as never before—or rarely! One of the side effects of coronavirus lockdown around the world has been the **tremendous reduction in pollution level**. One can breathe in fresh air. And after ages probably, stars are also visible in the night sky.

70,000 Endangered Sea Turtles Lay Eggs on Empty Beaches During Quarantine

While humans are on lockdown, Olive Ridley sea turtles are making a comeback on Indian shores.

300 Million Monarch Butterflies Are Headed Straight For New Mexico This Spring

Record-breaking numbers of the beautiful butterfly are about to swarm to New Mexico, and it's going to be quite the sight to see.

With No Visitors, Chicago Aquarium Lets Penguins Look At All The Exhibits

Feeding the Homeless *A city keeps its restaurants afloat by hiring them to cook for the homeless.*

Cambridge, Massachusetts has found a dual solution. The city is paying local restaurants to prepare the meals they would normally serve to customers and deliver them to shelters instead.

In the same boat

Australian tour operators repair the Great Barrier Reef:

Australia's tourism economy is at a standstill, leaving the country's tour boats bobbing in the harbors. Now, some of those companies are repurposing their idle vessels — and staff — for **coral restoration missions along the Great Barrier Reef.**

Sikh Volunteers Make 30,000 Free Home-Cooked Meals for Americans in Self-Isolation in New York

NEW LIGHT, LOOKING AND LIFE

Life finds a way! Love finds a way—to reach out, across the barriers, the obstacles, the differences. If we but look for it and jump in the middle of what God is already doing!

Thomas came from a place of doubt and despair, to a **new** look on life, of **seeing** things in a new **light**.

Just as Nature around us is teeming, constantly, with new life bursting forth! Especially now. It IS Spring, after all! Even though it's hard to believe sometimes!

How do we *embrace* that New Life? Come to a new way of seeing and believing? Seeing things in a new light?

How do we **reach** out and **touch**, even in this time of social distance and isolation? See one another with the heart and look for **solutions** and **teamwork**—come *together*, all working in the **same** direction, for the same goals—**saving lives**, bringing **new** life and focus *out* of the destructive places?

What are the **holes** in the **hands**, the **wounded** place in **Christ's** side and the Body of Christ around *us* that **you** need to **touch**?

Where do you need to see *proof* that Christ is alive. That the one standing before you IS Jesus—alive and walking and talking in our midst?

LIFE PUSHING THROUGH

Look for life pushing through—out of death, stones, obstacles, walls! For the stone IS pushed out of the way—by some force of Nature we can't begin to

comprehend! There IS new life bursting forth out of places that were stagnant, polluted, stuck, decaying.

Were you wondering what your purpose was in this time and stage of life? What is bursting forth in new ways, with new energy, from you? Out of the formerly stuck places? Inside your soul?

Could you ever have imagined you'd be stuck at home for weeks, months, not sick but needing to stay put so you wouldn't get sick?

Could you have imagined new life, creativity, rest, renewal, renewed ideas and projects spring forth when we are forced to set busyness aside as an excuse or an escape?!

On that first Easter, the stone was rolled away from the Tomb. By a divine force of nature. Of the Creator acting in creation in ways that changed the world.

Two weeks ago, I was a Doubting Rebecca! I never dreamed we'd be live-streamed! We didn't know how to do that! At least I didn't. I don't think Matthew did either, but we all got in and learned a lot in a quick hurry and here we are. That we'd all learn how to ZOOM and Skype and Facetime and You-Tube like pros?! Our gray-haired, mostly-over-60 little congregation?!

Were you wondering (I was!) if our congregation would make it through a time of conflict and work toward a greater purpose—One in the Spirit, one in the Lord?

Were you a Doubter? Wondering if the presence of the Risen Christ was *really* in our midst? If we were truly an Easter People?! Were you able to see the face of the risen Christ in the face of your brother and sister? The Spirit of Jesus pushing through the locked doors, the fearful hearts—eyes smiling above the masks, shining with love and hope—just for you?!

Keep Doubting and discerning what is *not* of God. *Not* of divine love and life-giving for *all* the children of God throughout the whole world. For doubting IS sometimes what is called for—as Thomas expressed his doubt and came to believe and proclaim the joy—God is here, in this Place, and we *know* it! Amen.