

Sunday, April 26, 2020 3rd Sunday of Easter Worship on Facebook 10:30
What's Next Sermon Series

Holy Scripture This week we read some words from Peter...post resurrection words. Actually these are words he spoke after the Holy Spirit descended like tongues of flames on the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem. These are wonderful words of encouragement and reminder that death never is the last word: **Acts 2: 24-28**

Reader: God raised Jesus up! God freed Jesus from death's dreadful grip, since it was impossible for death to hang on to him.

Remember what David says;

I foresaw that the Lord was always with me;
because he is at my right hand I won't be shaken.

Therefore, my heart was glad
and my tongue rejoiced.

Moreover, my body will live in hope,
because God won't abandon me to the grave,
nor permit his holy one to experience decay.

You, God, teach me the way of life.

In your presence, O God, is total celebration.

Beautiful things are always in your right hand. *Psalm 16/Acts 2: 24-28*

Take a minute here to contemplate the beautiful things in your life and the way that God is taking care of you and your body and your friends and your family. This is a time for you to offer your personal prayers of thanksgiving and appeal to Jesus...who walks through walls for you.

Music to contemplate *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing* \$400

*Peter, in the first reading, had figured out **What's Next** for himself. He was called to tell the people around him what happened with Jesus and why it is important. Valuable. A Total celebration. But Peter didn't jump straight from the morning of Resurrection to this kind of speech making. No, he, like the others, had to go through a period of time to figure out **What's Next**. Let's go back to an earlier time, in the life of Peter and the others. Let's return to that first Easter evening...knowing that Cleopas and his friend are walking the road to Emmaus. While the eleven closest followers of Jesus, Peter and his buddies were sheltering in place.*

Scripture John 20:19 - 25

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, appeared and stood among them and said,
"Peace be with you."

After he said this, Jesus 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."
²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin[👉]), one of the twelve,
 was not with them when Jesus came.
So when Thomas returned the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord."
But Thomas, 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."

Message of Hope--What's Next? Jesus is with us in the valuable, beautiful, wonderful parts of life as well...

That Thomas...what a guy. I'll be talking with the kids next week about Thomas as we hear the rest of the story. Which some of you may already know. And you can read it in John 20 anytime you want.

But for now we are left with Thomas saying, "I will NOT believe that Jesus is raised from the dead. And alive. And walking around. And walking through walls. And breathing on us and passing the Holy Spirit around. I will NOT believe until...unless...I have proof positive. See it with my own eyes. Touch his wounds with my own hands."

Yes Thomas is a doubter...that's the name that has stuck with him. But let's look at him this way too. Thomas knows what he values. He values proof. Visual. Tangible. Right in your face facts and evidence and truth. That's important to him.

You know what else is important to Thomas? Belief. Even as he says: I will not believe, he is also giving terms and conditions for what it's going to take in order for him to believe. And he wants that belief. Yes...Thomas wants to believe that Jesus is NOT dead anymore. He wants to believe that a miracle has happened. He wants to believe that God is with us and that Jesus is ushering in a new kingdom...And **What's Next** is going to be so much better than what used to. Thomas wants that really, really badly. If only...and not until, unless...

I appreciate Thomas because in spite of his doubts, at least his mind is open to belief. He has a vision of what it might be like for Jesus to return to life...wounds and all. And his mind and heart are hoping and waiting and even desperate to see that become real for him. So that he can take hold of that truth and get on with what's next. I picture Thomas and Peter and all the disciples that evening of the first day of Easter as exhausted by grief. Worn out with trying to figure it out. Afraid of what happened. Afraid of what's next. Afraid that everything is going to change. Afraid maybe that

nothing is going to change and the whole Jesus thing will fade away into a fever dream shadow land memory.

We know those feelings, don't we? Thinking about 'What's Next' **for** us raises those kinds of thoughts and fears **in** us as well. Especially at this time when governors and politicians and medical experts debate the wisdom of opening up shops and factories and golf-courses. (Congratulations to you golfers & boaters in Michigan by the way.)

But let's not get stuck in that place of exhaustion and grief and fear. That is not what Jesus wants for us. Remember this story of the disciples, huddled together: The house was closed up. The windows were shut. The door was locked. Then Jesus appeared. Right through the walls he came, just like only Jesus can do. Yes, Jesus showed up for the disciples and Jesus shows up for us.

And maybe we doubt it, like Thomas did. Because we too value proof and evidence. What's important though, for all of us, is to keep our hearts and minds open so that we can recognize Jesus when he appears. Let's be like Thomas and expect a miracle without putting too many restrictions on how and when we will know Jesus is among us.

Last week we recognized Jesus in the gestures of blessing, breaking, giving the bread like Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus. That's a start.

This week, let's go a little bit further and watch for how Jesus shows up in the things we value. Because Jesus is alive and present—not just in the places where we are tired and scared and grieving. No, my friends, Jesus also shows up in the places where our dreams are coming true. Jesus is there in the important and valuable places in your life.

Those of you who value gardening....Get out there in the dirt and feel Jesus, the gardener right over your shoulder.

Those of you who value your children and your grandchildren...Laugh with them and send them puzzles and pictures and feel Jesus, who said let the children come to me.

Those of you who value nature...Earth Day is 50 years old. Don't you think Jesus showed up this last month or more as cities shut down and skies cleared? Turtles got to lay their eggs on the busy beaches.

Jesus shows up whenever you have values...important stuff that opens you up to the experience of the divine. The holy. The creative. The organic. The beautiful. And when Jesus shows up, it's a lot easier to figure out What's Next. The presence of Jesus does bring clarity.

Trinity Church, through the Church Unique process, has been talking about Values. What's important to this congregation? What opens us up to the presence of Jesus and helps us figure out what's next?

*Meaningful service here at Trinity: Community Meal, Committee meetings And Jesus is there, with us. In the feeding and in the meeting. As we consider what it means to Share God's love with those who hunger.

*Nurturing Community We love each other. We want to stay in touch with each other. Phone call chain to all the members of the church has been discussed and is being organized so we can nurture and care about each other even during this social isolation.

*Engaging worship Celebrating our spiritual connection with God and with each other. This Facetime live... Jesus is with us through all of this technology. Surely the Presence of the Lord is in this place and in your place and in every place as we share our gratitude and open our hearts and minds to what's next.

These valuable and precious activities of our church make it possible for those who are hoping for a miracle to see Jesus, here in town, the County, the State, the World. Jesus is present in what is happening and in who we are and in who we are becoming.

You may have doubts, like Thomas did, and that's OK as long as you stay open to the miracle that is waiting just around the corner. Because there is always something new, new life, new beginnings, a miracle waiting to happen when we see Jesus in the most valuable places in our lives.

We don't know for sure **what's next** what with this pandemic and staying at home all the time. We certainly don't know what the economics of this are going to be. But what we do know is that Jesus shows up...everywhere and all the time. And especially, Jesus shows up in the activities, the hopes and the dreams that we value. If you're waiting for proof, that's OK. Just keep your eyes and minds and hearts open because Jesus is there. Christ is alive. And more and more and more will be revealed.

Let us pray: Thank you Jesus, for teaching us the way of life that brings us joy and celebration. Help us to grow Our hope and our faith in you as we see your presence in all that surrounds us. Be with the people of this world in such a way that all may find comfort and peace, even healing, Lord, where that is your will. Bless the offerings of these your people. Offerings of prayers, service, celebration and financial support. May our gifts to you always be a true reflection of what we find valuable...help us to share that with you just as you share your presence with us. Praying the prayer that Jesus taught us.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

*Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Words of Comfort and Encouragement:

I have one final gift from Peter, who embraced his own What's Next and went on to serve Jesus in the Book of Acts, with speeches and miracles in person and we are left with two of his letters that have been passed down to us. These are

1 Peter 1: 13 – 25 excerpts

¹³ So prepare your minds...

All your hope should be for the gift of grace that will be yours
when Jesus Christ is shown to you...

You were bought, not with something that ruins like gold or silver,
but with the precious blood of Christ...

Through Christ you believe in God, who raised Christ from the dead and gave him glory.
So your faith and your hope are in God....

You have been born again,
and this new life did not come from something that dies,
but from something that cannot die.

You were born again through God's living message that continues forever.

In closing: Now hear the blessing:

May the powerful love of Jesus

Protect you and shield you from the sorrow of sickness.

May God Breathe hope into you and tend to any pain and suffering you may be feeling.

May the Holy breath/wind/Spirit be with you always until we meet again.

Go in peace.