



THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

APRIL 28, 2019

JOHN 20: 19-31

“YOU MEAN WE STILL GOTTA DEAL WITH THIS STUFF?”

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.

- Facebook is fake book. It’s useful for connecting people. High school and college friends, staying in touch with relatives who live at a distance. At CLC, we can communicate to people throughout Pittsburgh about who we are and what is happening.
- But, Facebook is fakebook. Just one incredible personal event after another. Here we are at Taiwanese Bistro Café 33, one of the hippest places to eat in Pittsburgh. At Mr. Small’s, a selfie with the lemonheads. On our vacation to New York, about to see the

Book of Mormon. Here's our baby looking perfect. Our whole crew at Easter with a champagne toast.

- But our daughter, Laynie, doesn't take a selfie as she looks in our refrigerator exclaiming, "There's nothing to eat in this house!" Or the two of you arguing on the streets of New York. The baby crying at three in the morning with you all bleary-eyed. The whole crew at Easter, looking like the living dead, passed out in the living room from eating too many carbs. Watching reruns of *The Jeffersons* on a Friday night.
- I've had any number of clients who have been distraught because their ordinary lives do not appear to compete with the beautiful lives they see on Facebook.
- And this is one of the reasons I trust the Gospels.
- In a Facebook world, the first Sunday after Easter would be even bigger than the Resurrection. Jesus and the disciples vacationing in Egypt. Selfies in front of the Sphinx. A fishing expedition on the Sea of Galilee—everyone hoisting their jaunty Jerusalem IPA. Getting tattoos: *bros forever* on their biceps. Hanging out at the Dead Sea music festival.
- No, John begins with "When it was evening that day." As Steve mentioned in his sunrise sermon, one of John's major themes is the contrast of darkness and light. And so, the first Sunday after the Resurrection, John does not begin with "As a glorious sun arises." No, as darkness approaches.
- Did you know that, as infants, we all go through a stage where our egos fall apart and we scream to high heaven as darkness approaches? Our egos are not yet strong enough to defend against the innate fear of the coming darkness. We cannot be comforted.
- And the disciples are not celebrating the Resurrection with boys' poker night out. They are huddled behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, complicit in Jesus' death.
- Fear is just another word for anxiety.
- Did you know anxiety has now surpassed depression as the number one diagnosed and medicated symptom in America? The whole world is anxious! And why not?
- At root, anxiety is the signal our psyche sends when we are about to fall apart.

- “If my daughter cries ‘Mommy’ one more time, I’m going to lose my mind.”
- “If one more thing goes wrong today, I’m going to crack.”
- “I can’t take the news anymore!” Climate change, children being killed by their parents, mass shootings, political conflict.
- But it doesn’t have to be anything big. It can just be the straw that breaks camel’s back.
- As a young adolescent, Laynie went on a church mission trip to Mexico and, on the return flight, we had to pick her up at the Lutheran Seminary at the University of Chicago. Now the freeways of Chicago make Pittsburgh roads look like a kiddie car track.
- I am not good on unfamiliar highways, so I get a bit of anxiety going as we hit Chicago. We’re coming from Galena, Illinois so we’re approaching Chicago from a different, unfamiliar direction. It is a Saturday so everybody and their mother are out driving like it’s the Indy 500. I’m not sure where I’m going and Deb’s pointing out where to go and where not to go. I’m about to tell her where to go when I exit where I think I need to and find myself in a truck loading area on the backside of O’Hare airport. And I lose it. A once-in-a-lifetime creative *stream of consciousness cursing* that would make a sailor blush.
- What was funny is that Deb, rather than being upset at me, actually looked at me with a kind of astonished admiration because of my imaginative use of the English language....
- That feeling right before losing it is called disintegration anxiety and is considered one of the worse feelings we can experience.
- And most of us know what it feels like.
- As spiritual people, we want to take a loving and non-judgmental stance toward ours and others experience of high anxiety.
- What I know from personal experience and my psychotherapy practice is that we will do anything to avoid disintegration anxiety.

- There is a compassionate way to understand our use of substances. Hard drinking, drug use, gambling, food, pornography are all ways to fend off states of unbearable anxiety. Attempts to hold ourselves together.
- Think of a casino. It's built like a large, dark womb. No windows letting in the outer world. Temperature perfectly controlled. All our needs taken care of—drinks, food, and the constant psychological rush of the gaming cycle. No anxiety until we walk outside with our losses, of course.
- We could call pornography the poor man's Xanax. For a man, the images calm and soothe and allows him to re-enter the maternal womb.
- But wait a minute!
- **Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed. Alleluia. Happy Easter!**
- Yet even so, darkness approaches and the disciples have locked the doors because of their anxiety.
- **You mean we still gotta deal with this stuff?**
- Yep....
- This one event does not change what we all have to face. Resurrection does not mean that it is now all sunshine and roses. That life no longer contains darkness and anxiety.
- This is not Facebook. This is Factbook. Truthbook. The Way It Is Book.
- And so what is this post-Resurrection story telling us?
- Jesus appears out of nowhere and says, "Peace be with you." And then he shows the disciples his hands and side.
- **What we're getting is the great both/and.**
- Here is anxiety and here is Jesus offering peace.
- Here is Jesus transformed and yet bearing the scars where he has been tortured.

- **Here is the great both/and.**
- **The spiritual world of light, peace, and new life now revealed as intersecting with this material world of darkness, anxiety and death.**
- Not one or the another. Not one now and one to come later. Not just this world where we just slog through the best we can until we get to some vague heaven, but **the invisible spiritual world interconnected and integrated with our visible, material world.**
- Or let's put it like this: **I was lost and now I'm found, but I'm still a mess and that's okay.**
- Because into our material bodies—into our enfleshed souls—Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit. This evokes the creation story in Genesis when the creative Spirit of God breathes over the deep waters.
- The old rabbis taught that the name Yahweh came from the spiritual practice of inhaling and exhaling the Spirit of God.
- Yah-weh. Yah-weh.
- A way to remind ourselves that God is as intimately connected to us as our very breath. That God is the breathing energy in which we live and move....
- But, as if darkness and anxiety are not enough in this post-Resurrection experience, we now get Thomas and the experience of doubt. Thomas who is so immersed in the material world that he cannot believe in anything that he cannot see, touch, smell, hear, or taste. He is the consummate contemporary man or woman who doubts the existence of anything outside the world of the senses.
- It is the world of either/or, not both/and.
- Bad religion considers doubt a problem. It's either/or. Healthy religion sees faith and doubt as kissing cousins. We cannot have one without the other. Thomas is just trapped in the either/or.

- If faith is part of the conscious mind, then doubt is in the unconscious. If doubt is dominant in the conscious mind, faith is in the unconscious. Spiritual health is being able to hold both in creative tension.
- Frederick Buechner calls doubt the “ants-in-the-pants” of faith.
- Both/and. We do not deepen into faith without doubt undermining our old way of thinking and living.
- So, even after the Resurrection, we still gotta deal with this stuff?
- Yep...
- In the darkness, anxiety and doubt of our story, we might fail to notice one little change.
- “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.’”
- The door is still shut, but it is not locked. The anxiety is slowly fading. Spiritual growth is taken place.
- When we take on our calling as spiritual people attempting to become fully human, then we experience this intersection of the invisible spiritual world with our material world and we slowly begin to heal and move toward our fullness as individuals.
- And for Christians, Baptism is the conduit by which the Holy Spirit this morning ushers Zandra into spiritual reality, as has happened for all of us here.
- Life in Christ is one of creative insecurity. Discovering the light in the darkness. Stumbling upon the peace in the midst of anxiety. Finding faith among the doubt.
- You mean we still have to deal with this stuff?
- Yes, but we are not alone. We have the entire invisible spiritual world, revealed in the resurrection of Christ, as our constant presence.
- Song: **I Forgot That Love Existed** by Van Morrison