

Sermon
19 April 2020
West Kirk of Calder/Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Reading: John 20:19-21;24-31

Hymn: CH4 419 Thine be the glory

READING

John 20:19-21;24-31 (NIVUK)

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.'

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!'

But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.'

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your

finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'

²⁸ Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

MESSAGE

Do you also sometimes feel as if this – everything that's happening at the moment – is only a dream? I wish it *was* only a dream...

Covid-19 has changed our lives into something unbelievably surreal. I sometimes have to pinch myself to remind me that this is actually really happening – it's not just some science fiction story on the telly – it's my life!

Who would ever think, that in this day and age, with all the amazing technological breakthroughs and scientific discoveries, that an invisible virus could have us all locked up inside our homes, causing devastating losses all over the world?

Yet – it's true. It's happening. It might feel surreal and unbelievable, but in actual fact – it's as real as real can be.

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I can just imagine that on the evening of that very first Easter Sunday, when the disciples were sitting together in a locked room, that they might have had a very similar experience...

That they might have found it hard to believe that what was happening to them was actually the reality.

Jesus was dead. They felt devastated and confused.

But then – out of the blue – Jesus appeared to them! They were overjoyed, yet probably feeling the urge to pinch themselves! Could this actually be true?

But it was, they were seeing him with their own eyes. The impossible happened. God made Jesus alive again!

Thomas wasn't with them when all this happened. They were bursting with excitement to share this amazing news with him, but despite the fact that 10 people he knew very well and trusted, all testified to the fact that they saw Jesus, Thomas didn't believe them. For him, it was too good to be true.

The one thing they were all hoping and praying for *happened*, but he just couldn't believe it, it felt too surreal. So he declared that only if he sees this for himself, if he meets Jesus and sees the nail marks in his hands and touch it, he will believe it.

So one week later, the following Sunday, they were gathered again behind locked doors. Jesus appeared again, exactly in the same way as before. This time Thomas was with them.

Jesus walked straight up to him, and invited him to touch his hands and his side. Jesus knew Thomas. So he told him to stop doubting and to believe.

We don't know if Thomas actually touched Jesus, but to me it sounds as if he didn't. As if he just looked at Jesus and proclaimed him as his Lord and his God.

And then Jesus said something profound: "Because you have seen me, you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

No matter how surreal all this felt to Thomas, it was true, it was real.

And it still is today. Jesus is alive. And that gives *us* a completely new perspective on life...

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What really touched me when I read this passage in the Bible again this time, was Jesus' invitation to Thomas to come touch his hands.

Because that is something we can't do at the moment. Who would ever have thought that touching someone's hand, or giving them a cuddle, would become an impossibility?

Something so small – a simple gesture of love and care, can make such a huge difference to someone else. It can make them feel special, visible, heard, supported, loved.

And we have just been taking this for granted all our lives. Because at the moment we can't touch each other. *To keep each other safe.* We can't see each other. *To keep each other safe.* And I really miss it, as I am sure you do too.

I hope that this will be a lesson to people all over the world to never take even the simplest things for granted ever again.

I'm encouraged by the fact that in the end, Thomas – although he could – didn't need to touch Jesus to believe. The presence of Jesus in that room was enough for him to know what the truth was.

We might not be able to touch each other's hands at the moment, we might never be able to touch Jesus' hands in the Thomas could have if he wanted to, but let's feel his presence around us in a such a way that we don't feel the need to want proof before we believe.

Jesus greeted his disciples with the words: "Peace be with you". Up until that day, "peace be with you" was the normal way in which people greeted each other. But after Jesus' resurrection, these words got a much deeper meaning.

If we are filled with the peace of God, we will experience an inner calm that will give us the strength to face storms and come out on the other side as stronger people.

I can't wait to give every single one of you a handshake or a cuddle at the church door again, but until such time: "Peace be with you."

Please remember that you are not alone. We might find ourselves in an unbelievably surreal situation, but we will get through this. Because Jesus is alive. And he is with us. He is with all your loved ones. And he is with you. You might not be able to see him, but just *believe* it!

Peace be with you.

Amen

Prayer

Written by Rev Alison Quilter

Almighty God, the source of all beauty and goodness and love, we have come together this day to worship you. Your power has a purpose and we see the evidence of that in the beauty of creation, and in the human potential for understanding and creativity. Above all, your love and your power are focussed in the life and death and rising again of Jesus, your Son, our Saviour, and we rejoice in the hope that is at the heart of Easter: the new beginning, the light of resurrection flooding over the shadow of the Cross.

Help us we pray, to live each day in the light of Easter, with its joy bubbling up in our hearts, its laughter shining from our eyes, and its message always on our lips, that we may live and speak as people of the resurrection, showing by our words and deeds the sense of joy and purpose that Easter brings.

We thank you for the realities of Easter which we continue to celebrate today, realities that make such a difference to life – the victory of good over evil, love over hate, life over death; the turning of weakness into strength, fear into courage, doubt into faith; a new beginning where it had seemed despair; new confidence where there had been confusion.

But we are too well aware that the light of the resurrection is obscured from many by the deep darkness of their shadowland existence. We pray for those bowed low by the weight of sorrow or despair through illness or bereavement, through loss of self-confidence, guilt, shame or fear. We pray for those caught in the cross-fire of conflicts and fearing for their future. For all, we pray that their shadows be pierced by resurrection light, and hope spring newly eternal within them.

We ask your blessing on all those working in medical, health and social care, science, technology and manufacturing, utility companies, food producers, distributors and service in shops, education, postal workers, police services, armed forces and for all the unsung heroes in our local communities and many others who are providing support to us all in this time of shadow.

Take away our crippling doubts and fears, and through your Holy Spirit bring us to life in your service; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray together.....

*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 debts as we forgive our debtors.*

*Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil,
for thine is the kingdom, the power and glory for ever.
Amen.*

HYMN

CH4 547: What a friend we have in Jesus

What a Friend we have in Jesus,

All our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry

Everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit,

O what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry

Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?

Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged,

Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful

Who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness,

Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,

Cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge—

Take it to the Lord in prayer;

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?

Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
You will find a solace there.