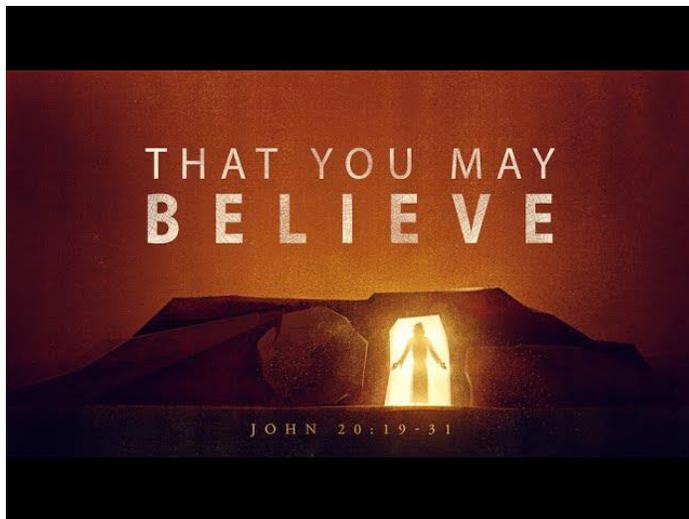


EASTER & THE DAYS THAT FOLLOW

John 20:19-31 • From Fear & Doubt to Courage & Assurance

He's alive! So now what?? Once the eggs have been found, chocolate consumed, and bonnets put away, it may seem that Easter loses its thrill. But the empty tomb is only the beginning of the story, and there are important lessons to be gained from events immediately after the resurrection as well as further down the road.



Whereas the first half of chapter 20 focusing on the experience of Mary Magdalene is more of a study of faith in the shadows coming out into the light, the emphasis in the latter half is on overcoming unbelief; an issue not of knowledge but faith and the greater working of God's Word. A number of transformations take place in these verses to illustrate this on a practical and personal level.

This passage focuses on Christ's appearances after resurrection and how disciples perceived Him. Emphasis is on trusting, as well as how we are encouraged to spread the Good News with others.

People of God, we can be certain that Jesus is alive and worthy of our trust; because He takes away sin, we are to spread the news of His work with other people.

Lord Jesus Christ, on the second Sunday of Easter, the light of your love shines on! Your light has come into the world, and neither darkness, nor evil, nor even death itself could overcome it.

And we (like Mary, like the disciples, like "doubting" Thomas) who have been there with you through Holy Week and the first Easter Morning have been made witnesses to the resurrection story: wondering, bewildered, hoping, rejoicing and sometimes doubting. It is not always easy to believe with our minds and trust with our hearts.

Loving Christ, open the eyes of our faith that we may behold the work of your redemption. Open our minds and hearts to receive you, Lord: your resurrection glory, your light everlasting. May this time of worship, reflection and celebration

be a worthy response to your love and your sacrifice for us.

Together we pray as you taught your disciples to pray: 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. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. *Adapted from <https://re-worship.blogspot.com>*

Monday, 12 April 2021 & Tuesday, 13 April 2021

The Risen Jesus meets his closest friends for the first time after they had all abandoned him in his hour of need. It must have been a moment they were all dreading. Yet his first words, twice over, were, 'Peace be with you'. No rebuke, no reproach, just 'Peace!' And then he showed them his wounds, the unmistakable signs.

Jesus gives the disciples peace, but he also gives them an incredible charge. "Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

Jesus entrusts the disciples with the ministry of the gospel which brings the forgiveness of sins. But he also knows that they cannot do this ministry alone because they are weak. Therefore, Jesus breathes on them and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit.

- ⇒ If the Apostles needed the ministry of the Holy Spirit to sustain them in their weakness, how much more do we need Her ministry in our lives?
- ⇒ In what ways does the Holy Spirit sustain and minister to the people of God?
- ⇒ How does confidence in the work of the Holy Spirit shape the way that we think about ministry to others (whether corporately or individually)?
- ⇒ What might it look like to be more dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit?

As the Father sent me, I also send you'. While they were feeling they had failed abysmally as his disciples, he entrusted them with the same mission he had received from the Father: now they knew it was not they who had chosen him, but he had chosen them. Their mission, a mission of bringing forgiveness of sins, was to be carried out by the power of the Holy Spirit. I stand in awe in the presence of the Risen Jesus, sharing his great joy and that of his best friends at this meeting.

The disciples are in a terribly difficult situation and they were afraid.

- ⇒ What are some of the circumstances that would have caused them to fear?
- ⇒ What are the circumstances that are most fearful for you?

We need to hear again and again that God's promise is for us. In these times, especially, feelings of isolation or despair can easily creep in. But we are in this together. Siblings of Christ, we are brought together by God's love, and we are bound together by the love of Christ, which knows no boundaries!

Study question:

- ⇒ 'Jesus breathed on them'. Ask him to breathe on me.
- ⇒ What might that mean for me? Can I pray with my doubt?
- ⇒ Can I talk with Jesus about the struggles I have in believing?
- ⇒ Do I have any sense of 'being sent'?
- ⇒ Good news is for sharing and passing on.

Wednesday, 14 April 2021

Because of our uncomfortableness with death, we tend to deny it or think we will beat the odds. But our human efforts to deal with death only burden and bind us. God has solved our death problem by sending Jesus to undo what has been done and repair the damage done by death. Therefore, we rest in Jesus as a new person headed towards Resurrection Life.

- ⇒ Question: Have you ever had someone tell you some news that you thought was unbelievable when you first heard it? How did things work out?

The events described in this passage, John 20:19-31, take place during the evening of the day Jesus rose from the dead. Some of Jesus' followers, including the women who went to Jesus' tomb that morning and Peter and John, have seen the empty tomb, but only Mary Magdalene and the two disciples who traveled to Emmaus have seen Jesus in person after His resurrection.

- ⇒ What does the passage say to you?
- ⇒ How did the followers of Jesus feel before He appeared among them?
- ⇒ How did they feel after Jesus appeared among them?
- ⇒ What was Thomas's response when he was told that the other disciples had seen Jesus alive?
- ⇒ What was his response after he saw Jesus with his own eyes?

Risen Christ, like the disciples, we are gathered together the week after Easter: wondering whether it is true; yet marveling at the possibility, and daring to hope. Like the disciples, we are sometimes afraid, sometimes full of doubt.

But in your extravagant generosity, your boundless love, you appear to us in our fear and love us in our doubts and grant us boundless peace. Thank you for loving us – just as we are.

Teach us not to hide from our doubt, but to recognize it as a door to deeper faith and a hunger for a closer relationship with you and your people. After all, the disciples' fear became a visitation as they saw you among them, risen and triumphant. Thomas' doubt became a moment of revelation as he saw and touched you, and finally believed.

This morning we pray for the many men and women in our society who have no faith at all. There are so many who live without hope, without knowledge of your resurrection, without your light in their lives. Grant us the courage to live as witnesses to your resurrection. Risen Christ, be the brilliant warming light in our cold dark world.

We especially pray for those in our congregation this morning who find it difficult to believe. Patient God, you know that they are not alone: even Christ's own disciples struggled to believe all that they had seen and heard. Loving Christ, it is your presence that removes all fear and erases all doubts: so, come, and grant the doubting Thomases in our midst your presence & peace. And grant to all of us, living Christ, renewed faith, great courage, and your boundless peace. Amen.

Thursday, 15 April 2021

- ⇒ What are some possible reasons why Thomas found it hard to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead?
- ⇒ Seeing Jesus alive was the evidence that Thomas needed to believe that He had risen from the dead. What evidence supports our belief that Jesus has risen from the dead?
- ⇒ Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Why is it a blessing to believe that Jesus has risen from the dead?
- ⇒ What are some ways that you might be like Thomas?
- ⇒ Jesus gave Thomas what he needed to believe that Jesus was risen from the dead. What are some ways that Jesus has given you what you need to believe that He is your risen Lord and Savior?
- ⇒ What difference does belief that Jesus has risen from the dead make in our lives?

Friday, 16 April 2021

Reflection: Are the doors of my heart locked? Do I not expect Jesus to show up and visit me? Am I afraid – afraid that my well-ordered ways of thinking and doing things might be turned upside down if I let Jesus in?

Pray: Jesus, pummel my unyielding heart and break down my defenses, and come in. I welcome you into my life.

Saturday, 10 April 2021

'Sending' is what God likes to do. Jesus is sent, the Holy Spirit is sent, and we are sent too. Jesus is sent to bring love, light and truth into the world. I too am sent. I am to bring love, light and truth into my little world. I am important to the plans of God. The world will be better if I carry out my mission. Faith in the Lord, while personal, is not a private affair. In the faith of one, the faith of another may be strengthened.

The spreading of the good news of the risen Christ depended wholly on one thing – witnesses. Most of the story following Jesus' resurrection in the gospel of John is about the witnesses and what they saw and heard. Jesus once again sent them all to be witnesses in the world. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Jesus blesses all who are recipients of the witness of the disciples. This story wraps up with John's explanation that these stories were written down for all the people who would not have opportunity to see Jesus face to face. We can continue to be witnesses of what we see and hear – Jesus is all around us, ready to be seen and heard by whomever is open to see and hear. And if you are fearful and troubled, Jesus calls you now to trust Him to bring His lasting peace and joy into your life. O let us not be faithless any more, but believing!

Talking to Our Heavenly Father - *If we have faith, our prayers will be answered.*

You're Not Alone, Let Us Pray with You & For You

- Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf, prayers for successful upcoming surgery and containment of growth; Mr. Alan Kempf for strength as he's provided times of rest and refreshment; alankempf33@gmail.com; 414B. South Pleasantview Road, Plymouth, WI 53073; phone number: 920.838.1830.
- Bro. Martin Martinelli, healing and restoration after open heart surgery and rehab after Ischemic stroke; 659 South 14th Ave. West Bend. WI 53095
- Mr. Ted Meilahn, restoration of strength and courage as he lives into his “new normal”; 1085 Fondu du Lac Ave., Box 23, Kewaskum, WI 53040
- Ms. Vivien Loomis, healing and strength after surgery; 1119 Schmidt Road, #1, West Bend, WI 53090
- Ms. Julia Stettler, strength and ability to meet the challenges and changes that will occur during the next few months; 107 Cedar Ridge Dr. #N313, West Bend, WI 53095
- 5th Avenue UMC's Laity, Laity Leadership, Pastor & Bro. Martin – Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.
- Bro. Bob Krell, continued prayer for healing; 804 Lenora Drive, West Bend, WI 53090
- The welfare and security of the United States of America and democracy itself.
- Mr. Roger Sacia, prayers for healing; Mrs. Nobi Sacia words of encouragement and prayers for healing; 502 Crocus Court, West Bend, WI 53095
- Ms. Nancy Whitson, healing and strength after hospitalization; 922 Hickory Street, West Bend, WI 53095
- Mr. William (Bill) Hornung, in inpatient rehabilitation; Mrs. Ginger Hornung, strength and courage; W193 N16339 Lea Fon Circle, Jackson, WI 53037

A PRAYER FOR NEW LIFE

Lord Jesus Christ, in this world where hopes are so often dashed and dreams so often broken, we remember today the faith in the future you brought to so many, both through your coming and through your resurrection from the dead. Lord Jesus, where faith has died and dreams have faded, may hope flower again.

We remember how Mary and Joseph looked forward to the day of your birth, how shepherds and magi caught their breath in wonder as they knelt before you, how the hearts of Anna and Simeon leapt in anticipation, and how your disciples and the crowds that flocked to hear you gave thanks, convinced that you were the Messiah, the one God had promised, the long-awaited deliverer come to set them free. Lord Jesus, where faith has died and dreams have faded, may hope flower again.

We remember how that vision of the future was shattered by events to follow – your pain, humiliation, suffering and death – hope ebbing away as the lifeblood seeped from your body – an end to their dreams, an end to everything. Lord Jesus, where faith has died and dreams have faded, may hope flower again.

We remember how the news spread that the tomb was empty, the stone rolled away, your body gone, and how despite it all, your followers could scarcely bring themselves to hope—afraid to take the risk of faith in case they should face the heartache of losing you once more. Lord Jesus, where faith has died and dreams have faded, may hope flower again.

But we remember finally how you appeared, in all your risen glory – in the garden, in the upstairs room, on the Emmaus road, by the Sea of Galilee –and the dream was born again, the smoldering embers of faith rekindled. Lord Jesus, where faith has died and dreams have faded, may hope flower again.

Lord Jesus Christ, a world is waiting, hurting, longing, searching for hope, crying out for meaning, hungry for some reason to believe in the future. Come again in your living power, and bring new life to all. Lord Jesus, where faith has died and dreams have faded, may hope flower again. In your name we pray. Amen — Nick Fawcett, Prayer for All Seasons

**Breathe your Spirit upon each of us;
your humble Pastor-servant leaders,
Pastor Clarissa & Bro. Martin**