

## RESURRECTED HOPE

Text: John 20:19-31

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.

April 4<sup>th</sup>, marked 50 years since the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King's legacy remains frozen in time for the world. His quest to overturn racial segregation particularly in the American South through the civil rights movement rings in our consciousness, from his powerful speeches to his leadership of nonviolent marches to his steady calmness amidst bombings, fire hoses, imprisonment and ultimately martyrdom. According to the NY Times, even though King accomplished a lot, he was confronting challenges related to race and class that we are still struggling with today. And I quote:

He was battling racism in the North then, not just in the South. He was pushing the government to address poverty, income inequality, structural racism and segregation in cities like Boston and Chicago. He was also calling for an end to a war that was draining the national treasury of funds needed to finance a progressive domestic agenda.

King dreamed of a beloved community in which everyone belonged and had access to opportunity regardless of their color, gender or culture; however when he was assassinated on that fateful date in Memphis, there were many who felt that the hope of his dream died with him...

In our text on this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter, we are drawn into the story of the aftermath of Jesus' death. Jesus had been executed on the cross; however, he overcame the grasp of death and

rose from the dead. The text tells us that he had revealed himself to his disciples, all but one, Thomas the twin. Jesus had accomplished a lot and for sure engaged in effective ministry; however, fear of the future and the fear of the unknown still loomed. To some the hope of the good news that Jesus proclaimed died with Him. What was to be the next move for Jesus' followers. The truth is even though several of Jesus disciples saw him about a week prior, they were very much concerned for their safety. Publicly, they still did not want to give evidence that they really knew JC. They retreated to an "undisclosed location" and their emotions were running high. In addition to fear and certainty, they also faced grief and doubt. The truth is they had been with Jesus when he delivered the sermon on the mount, fed the 5000, walked on water and even raised the dead. In their minds there was no doubt that he was one of the most inspirational leaders they had ever encountered. The crowds followed him everywhere, he was even given a parade the last time he arrived in Jerusalem prior to this death; however, he was also a very controversial figure, to some his identity as the king of the Jews or the Messiah immediately marked him as an enemy of the state and an immediate threat to those in political power and a threat to the nation. A lot had happened and for the disciples who had an opportunity to see Jesus in person after his resurrection. Maybe as a result of seeing him in the flesh gave his disciples a sense of relief or an assurance that this Gospel this, "Hope" that Jesus proclaimed was not a hoax.

However, Thomas, the twin was not quite there...A lot had happened... maybe too much had happened... Was his journey in this new faith done before it was started good? Thomas is often referred to as Doubting Thomas; however, I assert to you that his doubt was not a deal breaker. A lot had happened during his journey with Jesus and along this path of his new faith. Thomas loved Jesus and was committed to the cause, he was even willing to die for the cause; however, in light of the series of events, he needed to know more, he had more questions, he needed to be able to experience some tangible indicators, he needed evidence that he was on the right path and ultimately everything was going to be ok. (Sitz en Leben)

As I reflect on the state of our country 50 years after the murder of MLK, it is safe to say that a lot has happened. Fifty years after King's death, according to the US Census, over 43 million people in this country are poor. 1 in 5 children are poor and children of color are disproportionately poor (1 in 3 African American and 1-4 Latino); 7-12% Americans are uninsured. Furthermore, according to John Powell, leader of the Haas Institute, the biggest issue facing America is "othering" which suggests that segregation across racial, cultural and gender lines is alive and well and it is perpetuated across systems within our society that continues to widen the economic divide between the haves and the have nots. Othering suggests that some groups belong in our society and have access to opportunity while others do not. Especially for those of us who have been on the front lines of this work, in recent history, we have been disillusioned, we have experienced despair, questions seem to consume us and the need for

some tangible motivation to hope for a society where everybody belongs is with us. We have doubts, sometimes we are apprehensive about the future similar to that of Thomas. The question is, "Are our doubts a dealbreaker?"

Here is a word from Pope Francis on doubt and I quote, "

"Many times I find myself in a crisis of faith, ...A Christian who "hasn't doubts, who hasn't had a crisis of faith, is a Christian who's missing something..."

Maybe you have heard this story before; however, it was Mother Teresa who really struggled and found herself in a faith crises for the last 40 years of her life. She really struggled with her faith and wrestled to perceive God's presence more tangibly. In the midst of her anguish, her faith however unfelt, helped propel her forward and God was indeed glorified. As she served some of the poorest, conflicted people in the world, for obvious reasons she herself was traumatized and tormented; however, she put one foot in front of the other and stayed the course of her journey with Christ. In the same right we are being called to do the same. We are called to keep waking up and embracing the new possibilities of each day knowing that God is indeed Emmanuel, he is with us whether, we hear him, see him or able to perceive God's touch. Have all of society's ills been solved, no; however, do we need to continue to show up in the world as the children of light and do we need to continue to show up as vessels of hope? Yes! Will we be faced with personal loss and adversity in our lives which at times leave us feeling that we have been abandoned and are all alone, devastated and sometimes humiliated? Yes!, Hear a word from the Lord

Isaiah 49:15-16

Can a woman forget her nursing child,  
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?  
Even these may forget,  
yet I will not forget you.  
See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;  
your walls are continually before me.

Isaiah 43

**Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;**  
**I have called you by name, you are mine.**

<sup>2</sup>When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.

<sup>3</sup>For I am the LORD your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.  
I give Egypt as your ransom,  
Ethiopia<sup>a</sup> and Seba in exchange for you.  
<sup>4</sup> Because you are precious in my sight,  
and honored, and I love you,  
I give people in return for you,  
nations in exchange for your life.  
<sup>5</sup> Do not fear, for I am with you;

Our doubts by no means are deal breakers and through my own experiences of uncertainty, I have found myself asking more questions than ever while at the same time holding on to God patient steady hand for dear life. My testimony is the fact that Pastor Elizabeth invited me to come and preach here today and that fact that I am standing before you today is a manifestation of resurrected hope. I would venture to say that the fact that we made it to church today and are doing so with one another, is a sign of resurrected hope.

Even in the case with Thomas, his moment of uncertainty did not change his level of access to the community of faith and his position as a disciple. The same holds true for us. Regardless of where we find ourselves on the faith/hope continuum, we can always be certain that we need Jesus and we can without a shadow of doubt be assured that God is here to stay with us. Jesus' departing words to his disciples was I will be with you until the end of the earth, I will never leave you nor forsake you...

So I offer you this my sisters and brothers...our grief, our brokenness which sometimes leads to questions, doubt or even despair, are by no means a deal breaker, Our doubt is the door of opportunity to a resurrected hope and a resurrected faith. Thanks be to God...

As we look to the table that has been prepared for us today, all are welcome at this table— Everyone belongs. In God's eyes we are one family. This table is open to those of us who have the faith and hope the size of the mustard seed and those of us who feel we have silos which are overflowing. At this table we are all being invited to hold everything in common and to be of one heart and one soul, because, Christ has died, Christ is risen and Christ will indeed come again.

-Reverend Tiffney Marley

Go forth in peace.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit  
be with you all. Amen.

Excerpted from the Great Thanksgiving

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ.

Your Spirit anointed him

to preach good news to the poor,  
to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
and to announce that the time had come  
when you would save your people.

He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners.

By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection

you gave birth to your Church,  
delivered us from slavery to sin and death,  
and made with us a new covenant  
by water and the Spirit.

When the Lord Jesus ascended,

he promised to be with us always,  
in the power of your Word and Holy Spirit.

*The pastor may hold hands, palms down, over the bread, or touch the bread, or lift the bread.*

On the night in which he gave himself up for us,  
he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread,  
gave it to his disciples, and said:  
"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me."

*The pastor may hold hands, palms down, over the cup, or touch the cup, or lift the cup.*

When the supper was over, he took the cup,  
gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Drink from this, all of you;  
this is my blood of the new covenant,  
poured out for you and for many  
for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this, as often as you drink it,  
in remembrance of me."

*The pastor may raise hands.*

And so,  
in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,  
we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving  
as a holy and living sacrifice,  
in union with Christ's offering for us,  
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

**Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.**