

## John 20: 19-29

<sup>19</sup> 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.” <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

<sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> 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.”

<sup>26</sup> 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.” <sup>27</sup> 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.” <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup> 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.”

### Trinity Presbyterian Church

April 23, 2017

---

#### “Movements of a New Creation: Peace, Doubt, and Forgiveness”

**Intro:** Imagine the small house with the disciples holed up inside. Their terror level is on red alert. Emotions are on edge as they fear getting arrested or worse, falling into the same fate as Jesus. Some are pacing back and forth trying to calm their nerves. Some keep peeking out the slit in the curtains to see if there is any suspicious activity outside. Even brave Peter keeps double-checking the doors to make sure the deadbolt is locked. The disciples are acting agoraphobic—afraid of the outside world—when out of nowhere Jesus appears. Shows them the wounds in his hands and side. Then he breathes the Spirit on them as he speaks: “Peace be with you.”

**Move 1:** Peace be with you. They are the first words Jesus speaks to his disciples after the resurrection. Perhaps they are his first words to us, too. To the immigrants who have locked themselves inside their homes. Needing to keep a low profile. Not even wanting to chance the drive to the grocery store. Living in fear of being pulled over, detained or deported by the authorities. Jesus has words for them: “Peace be with you.” To the LGBTQ community who have questions if coming out is still safe or if new laws will keep us indoors, Jesus says, “Peace.” In our everyday world when fear tries to lock us in our closets where there is not much oxygen of hope. Jesus breaks in, fills us with the Spirit breath and says, “Peace.” Every week we pass his peace around. Flood the center aisle shaking hands and exchanging hugs. Reminding each other of the peace which frees us from the fear that keeps us trapped. “Peace be with you,” are Jesus’ first resurrection words to the agoraphobic disciples. They were timely words then. They are timely words now.

**Move 2:** Of course, we have our doubts. We might doubt the peace Christ speaks of. Might question if he ever came back at all. I mean, let's be honest: Thomas is not the only one who struggles with believing in the absurdity of the resurrection. We have our questions too. Our doubt is an important part of what it means to live as people of faith. As Annie Lamott once said, "Doubt isn't the opposite of faith, certainty is." And when it comes to the news of the resurrection, none of us is certain. Of course, doubt can go too far sometimes, turning into cynicism—where we don't trust anything. Or on the flip side, maybe we grew up with the fundamentalist voice shouting in our ear so we weren't allowed to doubt at all. But honestly, do we really think that God isn't aware that when it comes to believing in mysteries like the resurrection, naturally, at some point, we are going to have our doubts? You know, the bible mentions that Thomas has a twin, but his twin is never named. Maybe it's because we are the doubter's twin! Thomas is not the only skeptic in the room. Maybe doubt runs in the family! It is a part of what it means to behold the mystery; to be people of faith.

**Move 3:** But notice: Jesus is relentless. He keeps coming back again and again. He appears to the disciples once. Then a week later he appears to them again. Except this time, he says, go ahead and touch the evidence. Poke a finger in my holes. Stick your hand in my side. Touch my wounds. Now if there is any evidence that resurrection is possible, it is this: Jesus still bears his wounds. They are not even scarred over yet! They are still fresh and still a part of Jesus' story. Probably because our wounds are still a part of our story too. God somehow recycles them as evidence to point to resurrection's possibilities. You see, Jesus will not be satisfied, he will continue to pursue us, until he is let into every locked door, every shameful secret, every hurt we harbor. Because it is inside our wounded places where resurrection is possible. Jesus keeps coming after us. Keeps inviting us to touch the evidence. Put your fingers in the holes. Stick your hand in my side. Go ahead, touch my wounds, says Jesus. And now, let me touch yours.

**Move 4:** Now hold on! He doesn't stop there. He says I have a job for you. I'm sending you out into the world to forgive. How do we do it? How do we embody forgiveness so our wounds don't cripple us anymore? Fifty-six years ago, a six-year-old first grader, named Ruby Bridges was the first black student to attend an all-white school in New Orleans. You probably have heard the story. She was escorted by federal marshals and before her first day of class ended, parents of the white children pulled their kids out of school in a massive boycott. Every day she'd walk to class as protesters lined the streets waving confederate flags. Some had even bought child-sized caskets, placing a little black doll inside. One day Ruby's teacher noticed that as Ruby was walking to and from school, she was always moving her lips. So she asked Ruby, "Who are you talking to?" Ruby replied, "I was talking to God and praying for the people in the streets." Her teacher asked, "Why were you doing that, Ruby?" to which Ruby responded, "Well, because... Don't you think they need praying for?" "Where did you learn to do this?" the teacher wanted to know. "From my mom and my dad... and my church." "Well, what is your prayer for them?" This six-year-old said, "I always pray the same thing. Please, dear God, forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing." Now how does a six-year-old embody such gospel strength? Perhaps resurrection is more than a story. It's a reality we must cling to so our wounds don't destroy us. It's the work Jesus sends his church out to do. To help make resurrection real by forgiving each other.

**Conclusion:** We know God's peace is greater than fear. We know resurrection hope is bigger than our wounds or doubts. So we fling open our locked doors, following Ruby out into the world with forgiveness on our lips. Sharing the peace and love our Lord gives to us. And blessed are those who come to believe.