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Second Sunday of Easter

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Every year, on this Second Sunday of Easter, we read the story of poor “Doubting Thomas.” It’s a good story for the Sunday after Easter—not only because most of the action takes place on the Sunday after Easter, but because we’ve all faced Thomas’s situation: what do we do when we’ve been told about the remarkable resurrection of Jesus but we can’t see the evidence for ourselves? And so usually preachers will talk about what faith really means, why doubt is really important, or maybe—depending on how far afield they want to go—what this whole resurrection thing is really about anyway.

This year, though, this story of Thomas and the other disciples feels more immediate to me. The reasons it feels relevant and interesting in other years are abstract and cognitive. This year is different. If in other years, I can identify with how Thomas thinks, this year I have a very real sense of solidarity with how the disciples feel, how they worship, what they do.

So rather than grappling with any of the big questions that this text raises about life, the universe, and everything, I just want to point out three small things that it tells us about how Jesus might be present with us right here and now.

First: Jesus can come to us behind closed doors. The disciples gather on the day of his resurrection, the first day of the week—the very first Sunday gathering of the Christian Church—and they huddle together exactly as we all gather today: behind closed doors. It doesn’t stop Jesus. He doesn’t wait until they’re doing something more appropriate. He doesn’t wait for them to go out to pray in the synagogue, or to offer a sacrifice in the Temple; to preach the good news

to a crowd or feed the hungry. He doesn't even wait for them to reach out to him in prayer; he reaches in to them.

Most of us are used to compartmentalizing our lives. Learning happens at school. Work happens at the office. Religion happens at church. But now, *everything* happens at home. School. Work. Even Church.

It might be difficult for you to worship in your home, to get into the right mindset, to feel like you're really participating in a community instead of consuming yet another hour of screen time. Those four walls and those locked doors that separate you from you from you from me might seem like they can keep us apart. But Jesus is really good at walking through walls. He's been doing it now for a hundred-thousand Sundays.

So I wonder: how has Jesus reached into your home during this strange new liturgical season of Coronatide?

Well I said I had three things. First—that was the long one—Jesus comes to us where we are, even through closed doors. Second: Jesus comes to us when we're afraid; and stays with us, even when we don't recognize him.

If you're like me, it was really hard to "get in the mood" for Holy Week last week. I felt like I was going through all the services without really *feeling* them the way they were supposed to feel. I imagine for you, on the other end of a screen, it may have been even harder. I couldn't quite feel the victorious march of Palm Sunday, the humble care of Maundy Thursday, the painful grief of Good Friday, the joyous alleluias of Easter.

The disciples could give a master class in feeling the "wrong" feels. In verse 18, Mary Magdalene "went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'" (John 20:18)—and

because men did not and still *do* not listen to or believe women, now in verse 19 the disciples have given no response, have felt no joy, and are sitting in a locked room, afraid.

And Jesus still comes to them, and says to them, “Peace be with you.” And they flip from incapacitating fear to exuberant joy and they still haven’t gotten the message and so Jesus has to say to them again, “Peace be with you.” And once more, the next week, for good measure: “Peace be with you.”

You don’t need to talk this way to people who are already feeling peaceful. The disciples are completely unprepared to experience Jesus’ resurrection peace. And when they’re in completely the wrong mood and when they just don’t get it, Jesus comes to them, again and again, as many times as they need, and greets them: “Peace be with you.”

So again, I wonder: how has Jesus brought peace into the midst of your fear this Coronatide?

My third and final thought: Jesus appears to us, risen from the dead but still carrying his wounds. This has always been my favorite part of this resurrection story. The resurrection isn’t a rewind. Jesus doesn’t simply appear again as the healthy thirty-something he was last Friday morning. His body has been permanently reshaped by the pain and the suffering he’s endured. He still bears the marks in his hands and his side. And yet it’s also been transformed into something beyond human imagining, as distinct from his old human form as a blooming flower is from a tiny seed.

We have all been wounded in one way or another, these last few months. “When this is all over”—one of our go-to phrases these days—things aren’t just going to go back to normal. We

aren't just going to flip a switch and go back to 2019, any more than Jesus could flip a switch and go back to the unbroken body he had on Good Friday morning. We'll carry with us the wounds and the scars of this time for a long time.

And yet...

I preached a sermon, way back when in the Before Times—I looked it up, it was January 12, a date that feels like it's across an unbridgeable chasm right now—about God coming as a refining fire, and I wondered whether any of us *really* wanted to handle that kind of heat?

We don't. It turns out. It's really, really hard.

But right now, we don't have a choice. We *are* "suffering various trials," we *are* being "tested by fire," (1 Peter 1:6-7) and while I don't for a minute believe that God sends these sorts of trials on us as a fun way to strengthen us, I *do* believe that God strengthens us in these trials, and that they will transform us.

There are seeds growing in us now, seeds that we can only begin to identify and imagine. Seeds of compassion and community. Seeds of love and kindness. Whole freaking rhododendrons'-worth of appreciating the little things in life. (It's going to feel so, so good to have coffee with my best friend.)

What the mystery of Jesus' resurrection tells us is this: The wounds are real. The pain is real. But the body that emerges on the other side of death will walk through walls to be with you, and say, "Peace be with you."

Amen.