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John 20:19-31

*Dead People Don’t Stay Dead*

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John 20:19-31 Common English Bible

It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you don’t forgive them, they aren’t forgiven.” Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn’t with the disciples when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, “We’ve seen the Lord!” But he replied, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won’t believe.” After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!” Thomas responded to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus replied, “Do you believe because you see me? Happy are those who don’t see and yet believe.” Then Jesus did many other miraculous signs in his disciples’ presence, signs that aren’t recorded in this scroll. But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God’s Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name.

 Today is a day for us to celebrate our earth and the goodness of God’s creation. It is a day for us to celebrate the possibility of new life. It is a day for us to give thanks because dead people don’t stay dead and dead things don’t think dead. There is always new life.

In our scripture it is Easter evening and it is not as joyous as it was here last Sunday. In the scripture the fear is palpable. The disciples are huddled behind locked doors as they struggle with the reality of the resurrection. Sometimes it feels like we are right there with the disciples, we are exhausted and struggling, we are trying to live on our own power, we are huddled behind a locked door of our own making. The amazing thing about resurrection is that something has to be dead in order to be resurrected. We have to decide if we are going to open ourselves up to the mighty power of God.

Our scripture begins with fear and darkness. Fear and darkness are often our companions, aren’t they? When we are afraid, often we huddle together and wonder what will happen to us. We worry only about ourselves. Our scripture reminds us that God is always standing with us.

Fifteen years ago I was a new pastor at Krum United Methodist Church. There was one couple that hadn’t been to church in a few weeks so I knocked on their door. The door opened and the man who answered told me that I would never be his pastor or his wife’s pastor because I was a woman. I didn’t understand because the church had female pastors before. I will never forget when that door was slammed in my face. I can still hear his voice, “You will never be our pastor!” I hope he found a pastor he is happy with and I'm so sorry he didn't think I was awesome, because I am.

We have these moments in our lives that stick with us, that are hard to forget. They can be good or they can be bad. The story in our scripture is one of those moments that stuck with Thomas and the other disciples. It was an experience for them that showed them that dead people don’t stay dead, that there is hope.

That’s good news, because there are a lot of things in our world that look dead and hopeless right now.  People are struggling to find jobs, struggling to fill their gas tanks, struggling to keep food on the table.  It seems every time you turn around a gunman has opened fire at a school, a night club, a church, or maybe just targeting people of a certain skin color on the streets. It’s hard to feel safe.  And that’s just thinking about here in the US. Genocide is still alive and well in our world. An incredibly high number of people, including a mind numbing number of innocent children, don’t have enough to eat and don’t have clean drinking water. Wars are raging, power hungry leaders are flexing their military muscles, hate-filled people keep driving their cars into crowds of innocent people.

Right here people in our church family have lost loved ones and are grieving. Some here are struggling with their health or love someone who is. Some are fighting unwanted addictions or are deeply affected by someone who is. There are burdens on our hearts. We need to be reminded that something has to be dead in order to be resurrected, because Jesus shows us that something that is dead can be resurrected.

In 1988 NBA Washington Wizards owner Abe Pollin and his friend Melvin Cohen donated $325,000 to help a class of 59 5th graders get to college. The benefactors told the students and parents, “when you’re ready to go to college, there will be funds to pay for your tuition.” They were greeted with silence, and then people began to slowly clap. Every single 5th grader said that they were going to go to college. Pollin and Cohen hired Tracy Proctor to keep the kids on track, to be eyes and ears in the lives of the students at home and at school. When the kids were in 5th grade, Proctor was certain that all 59 would go to college. Three years later, as the kids finished 8th grade, Proctor altered his definition of success. He hoped that they would grow up to be responsible citizens, that they would be law abiding and employed, that they would stay alive. 49 of the 59 kids, 83%, graduated from high school or got their GEDs. Almost half the students enrolled in college. 11 of the 59 kids graduated from college, 3 of those 11 attained advanced degrees, 12 completed trade school, 6 dropped out of high school and 6 of the kids are not able to be located. One of the students said that in 5th grade a seed was planted inside her.[[1]](#footnote-2) It was a seed of hope, a seed of new life.

We gather together as Greenland Hills so that we might be encountered by the Risen Christ one more time and be caught up in faith so that we may experience God’s abundant life. Faith is wonderful and comforting and life is hard. We have cancer scares or we didn’t get into the graduate school that we wanted. We are lonely or afraid and we don’t know what to do to make it better. We can’t sleep because we are anxious about our community, our country, our world. Our faith encourages us but we also need to be reminded of the stories of Jesus because in them we hear Jesus speaking to us and we have faith, hope, and confidence.

We gather together as Greenland Hills because we want those in our neighborhood who are in need of community, those who are in need of hope and new life, to know that they can find it here. Our intern is going to begin July 1 as the pastor at a church in Mesquite and it has been so fun this week to dream with him. We don’t know if there are any youth at their church, but we know for sure that there are youth in the community who need support, encouragement and love. Thursday night I saw Seussical at Woodrow Wilson and it was so fun to see so many folks from church there to support our Greenland Hills youth who were participating. I know here in this place there are folks who have not been hugged by anyone else since last Sunday at church. Folks look forward to church because they can get a hug, so make sure that you are hugging.

God is moving in our midst. We are participating in Amigos Day right now, working with other churches to fix up Ms. Williams’ house. Looking at everyone working together, getting to know Ms. Williams, celebrating her birthday Friday, the Risen Lord is with us. Christ is saying to us, “Peace be with you.”

I have always been struck by Jesus’ invitation in this story for Thomas to put your finger here, put your hand into my side. It is a reminder for me that love is stronger than death. It is a reminder that the worst brutality human beings are capable of is no match for the resurrecting power of God. Our world is filled with injustice and violence, despair, cynicism, and fear and we have to remember today that hope and faith will always triumph.

I remember when I was applying for a job and I was talking to my sister and worrying that I wouldn’t get it. My sister reassured me that I would get it because I always got everything that I wanted. That wasn’t true, but as my sister she felt like life was easy for me. I ended up not getting the job but her words stuck with me. We forget that we all have hardships, we all have difficulties, we all have wounds. When we feel like injustice and violence are going to rule, we have to remember Easter and the wounds of the Risen Christ because they are visible signs of the ultimate victory of life over death.

 John’s Gospel begins telling us that Jesus is the Word made flesh that makes the grace of God known in the world. Jesus has encounters with all of these people, with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the man who receives his sight, with Martha, Peter, Pilate, and each one of them responds in a different way. Some have confusion, some come to faith, some have questions, some fail to recognize Jesus. With Thomas we hear the ultimate profession of faith. Thomas moves from skepticism to doubt to opening himself up to the mighty power of God. Jesus is not only Lord but also God. My Lord and my God.

The reason for all of this is not to record everything Jesus did. The reason John’s Gospel is written is so that you, me, all of us, will have life in Jesus’ name. John is written so that we might have faith and believe that Jesus is the Christ, God’s chosen One, and have life in his name[[2]](#footnote-3).

I love Thomas for his honesty. I’ll believe it when I see it and touch it. We have all heard of doubting Thomas, but he also sounds discouraged to me. He is worn out and tired of fighting the fight, and he feels hopeless and afraid. He wants tangible proof that life is going to turn out okay. So do I. Thomas needs to see and touch in order to believe. So do I.

I look at this place, and I see love in your actions and love in your words. I believe that you are loving people because I have seen it and I have experienced it. When I doubt, when I am afraid, when I think about that man who said I would never be his pastor, when I wonder if I am good enough, or worthy enough, I think about how Jesus gave Thomas proof. Thomas needed proof and Jesus gave it to him. Jesus isn’t offended by the doubt. Jesus allows Thomas to see what he needs to see. Jesus reminded Thomas that there were many people who would believe and would not have the advantage of seeing Jesus. Those people would believe in Jesus because they experienced the love of Jesus from those who followed Jesus. They experienced a hug, a listening ear, a helping hand because Jesus is revealed when we share love and peace with one another.

Thomas with his doubts and his questions didn’t believe any less. It meant that he was willing to keep the door open to the wondrous possibilities of God. God gives each one of us wondrous possibilities to share love each and every day. Today may God be with us as we release our fears and as we remember that there is light in our darkness. It is good news that dead people don’t stay dead. Peace be with you, this day and every day. Amen.

1. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/the-promise-two-wealthy-men-set-out-to-transform-the-lives-of-59-poor-kids/2011/12/15/gIQAd13syO_story.html> t able to be located.chool adn ollege, 3 of those 11 attained advanced degrees, 12 completed trade schol,t e Risen Lord was w [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.davidlose.net/2017/04/easter-2-a-thomas-john-and-the-reason-we-gather/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)