

Second Sunday of Easter Joh 20:19- 31

Please join in prayer with me. May the intentions of our hearts, and the meditations of our imaginations keep us searching for you oh God who first seeks us. Amen

Hell Friends, I know this may seem Pollyanna to say that there are some good things that have come from this forced isolation. The pleasures of simple walks, finding new ways to connect with each other, but for me, one of the best is realizing I need to rely on my imagination like never before. Appreciating the wonderful gift we have been given that enables us to listen to music and dream....to read poetry and see our inner landscape portrayed...to hear stories and imagine we are there inside them.

As a way of entering the bible narrative I often imagine what it might have been like to be in those stories. I imagine the sights, sounds, smells and feelings that might not be included in the narrative.

Today I'd like to invite you to join me in an imaginative story. It's a famous story from John's Gospel most notably about Doubting Thomas, but really about all of us who struggle to feel hope who are discouraged by the task ahead as we sit in our darkened rooms. Maybe like me you can identify with those early disciples as locked behind doors because of fear.

Please join me as I imagine I am in that upper room.

We had become like strangers to each other after the trauma –If I couldn't trust myself to defend him, how could I trust these my siblings? These thoughts were like a song I couldn't get out of my head.

These thoughts impel me to get up, they give me the strength to leave the room, so I volunteer to go to the market for food.

It was blinding to go outside again after nothing to eat but my own remorse. The fresh air clears my head. It's good to have made a decision. With the cobwebs cleared from my brain, I return to the upper room to let them know I'm going home. But they greeted me as if it was they who saw clearly now. They stumbled over each other to tell me the crazy news "We have seen the Lord." Although their words were incomprehensible, their eyes were clear, they bounced around the room in ecstasy. When I told them I was not going to believe them, not until I could put my hand in the gash – the gash where the Roman soldier had pierced his side as if he were checking a piece of meat for doneness. They only laughed. The strange thing was they were no longer afraid, they wanted to go out and tell everyone this story. This unbelievable story.

We were together again the next week and I insisted that the windows be closed and the doors locked because I knew the authorities were still looking for us. Suddenly Jesus was there, and with him all the snakes that had been living in my head left. I could breathe again, and Jesus, laughing said, "Put your finger here, reach out your hand and put it in my side." The laughter couldn't keep in as I went to hug him. But he made me touch that wound, still warm and wet with blood. As I looked into those eyes that I thought I knew, I recognized how deeply he loved me. I felt the release of all the guilt I had carried, the forgiveness and understanding. I finally started to get all the scripture I had heard as a child about the God who called people to freedom. So I stammered, "My Lord and my God!"

Friends, this story makes a different sense to me as I move from understanding Thomas' fear to appreciating what God did in the Incarnation. Yes, the Incarnation. John's Gospel *begins* with God as the Word becoming flesh "The word became flesh and lived among us" John 1:14. I had always thought that the word flesh was somehow too graphic, too material. And then when we get to the *end* of the narrative, we meet Jesus inviting Thomas to "reach out and put your hand *in* my side." It doesn't get

much more graphic than that. Think about that- a God who becomes human -who experiences *everything* we do.

Now Jesus could have been upset with these followers who didn't get it. Who ran away when he needed them most, but instead his first words are "Peace be with you!" He knows their fear, he understands their anxiety. And rather than saying "Get over it" (which is what I say to myself when I am in fear and despair) He shows them how deeply he understands their hurt by showing his wounds. "Put your finger here!" It's as if he is saying "I know what it is to fear. I know what it is to feel abandoned."

But then he does more than empathize with them. He breathes on them. This breath brings us back to the very beginning of our story with God. In the beginning God breathed on the waters to start creation.

Here Jesus breathes on their chaos , on their anxiety and fear, and he says to his disciples, "Receive the Holy Spirit!"

Brothers and sisters, as we cope with being isolated due to Covid19, as the fear of what this plague is going to do to our community and culture – a fear that gnaws at our faith, as we struggle to see the good in this Easter season- Please remember that our God understands our fear. God has given the Spirit to us. The way to move beyond our fear is to take Jesus' words seriously, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Even in isolation we are sent to bring God's love to the world- a world that especially now needs to hear that God knows us, knows our fears and hurts- and more importantly God loves us as we are...fearful, wounded Thomases waiting in the dark.

Amen

Children's sermon

Hi guys! In today's Gospel you are going to hear a story about a guy who only believes what he can see. I'd like to read a story about seeing and believing but also the power of imagination. It's called The Gruffalo by Julia Donaldson.

Story

This story of the Gruffalo has a funny twist in it. The mouse, in order to protect herself invents this scary monster. And just by using her imagination all the animals that might want to eat her become afraid of the monster she has created. And then the twist- the monster she thinks she created appears! But this mouse is very smart. She uses her imagination to overcome the greatest fear she has.

In today's Gospel, Thomas can't imagine life without Jesus. But like the Gruffalo, Jesus appears. Jesus shows Thomas how to tell everyone about him, even if they can't see Jesus.

Pray with me, Dear Jesus thank you for loving us. Thank you for giving us brains that can imagine, help us to imagine the world you want us to live in. When we're afraid help us to remember that you are with us and have given us your spirit. Amen.