

*Recognizing Resurrection—Despite Our Doubts*

John 20: (19-20) 24-31

Sunday, April 26, 2020

Beargrass Christian Church

**I. INTRODUCTION.**

A. Good morning!

1. I hope you are staying healthy and staying connected.
2. And if you are now home-schooling children or grandchildren, I hope you are hanging in there—it can be challenging.
3. A little boy was working on a math lesson about shapes.
4. His mom asked, “What shape is the world?”
5. He said, “I’m not sure, but dad says it’s in the worst shape ever.”

B. Perhaps we can identify with that feeling?

1. Yet one of the strong messages of Easter is that we have hope!
2. We are inspired by the witness of scripture and the responses of God’s people who have helped the resurrection reality live on...
3. Even in the face of tremendous odds and hopeless situations.

C. These strange times have also provided more opportunities for meaningful theological conversations and reflection.

1. One of my colleagues said that he has had more serious interactions in the past few months than he has had in years.
2. A college student who came home early from school called him.
3. She confessed, “I’m really mixed up. I think I’ve lost my faith.”
4. To her surprise he said, “That’s good!”
5. She said, “You misunderstood me. I have learned things that have taken away my faith. And this whole pandemic...ugh.”
6. He replied, “And I said that’s good.”
7. “If your faith can be lost that easily, it’s not the faith you need.
8. “Now you can begin to replace it with real faith—the kind of faith that will remain in the midst of life’s hard questions.”

D. During the Easter season we will continue to examine stories from the Gospel of John and keep looking for signs of resurrection.

1. We will consider difficult questions and challenges.
2. In the midst of the despair and death, it is vitally important for all of us as people of faith to identify signs of life and new birth.

**II. TODAY WE WILL THINK ABOUT THOMAS.**

A. He is someone who struggles with his faith.

1. His friends are quarantined and keeping the number at ten.
2. But Thomas misses the “first” resurrection party with Jesus.
3. They are excited about the great news, but he doesn’t buy it.
4. “Thomas, what in the world is wrong with you?!”
5. And most of us immediately attach an adjective to his name.

- B. But we and the disciples and Thomas have a lot in common.
  1. Wouldn't it be safe to say that all the disciples were doubters?
  2. And there will be (and have been) times when we don't get direct, beyond the shadow of a doubt, confirmation.
- C. But doubt doesn't have to be a bad word.
  1. Healthy doubt can be the catalyst for deeper spiritual growth.
  2. We give Thomas a hard time because of his hesitation.
  3. But isn't there a fine line between doubt and faith?
  4. Don't we wrestle with questions about how God operates?
  5. Don't we wonder about some of the stories we hear?
- D. A prominent Virginia bishop died from the coronavirus.
  1. Despite authorities urging people to practice social distancing, he decided to hold an in-person service on March 22.
  2. He said: "I firmly believe that God is greater than this virus!"
  3. He vowed to keep preaching "unless in jail or in the hospital."
  4. Did the bishop die because of a lack of faith?
- E. Or what about the televangelist who likes to collect private jets?
  1. I saw a video clip of him preaching last week.
  2. He was violating lots of the coronavirus rules and regulations.
  3. Basically, he spit at the camera and said something like, "Be gone, coronavirus! In the name of Jesus, be gone!"
  4. I think the virus is still with us—is that due to the doubters?
- F. Or what about folks in our own church family?
  1. Someone had cancer, had surgery, and was sent home.
  2. Doctors said: "Six weeks—maybe six months at the most."
  3. But she and her family and friends and the church kept praying.
  4. Her name was sent to thousands of others by social media.
  5. Six months later she returned to the doctor—no cancer.
  6. The surgeon said, "Sometimes this happens. Some patients experience spontaneous remission. We don't know why?"
  7. But the woman was convinced about the reason for the healing.
  8. Was it because of faith—and if so, why her and not the many others who prayed and prayed and prayed just as hard?

### III. SO, WE LIVE WITH DOUBT AND WE LIVE WITH FAITH.

- A. And we stand in the tradition of Thomas, recognizing that doubts can be a helpful part of the faith process and journey.
- B. A respected theologian said, "If you don't have doubts, you are either kidding yourself or asleep—doubts keep faith growing."
- C. But that is not all there is to say about doubt—it can produce pain.
  1. At times our most serious doubts are not because of the action of God—but because of the apparent inaction of God...
  2. The moments when God is less than we wish God to be...
  3. The times when we cry out, and there seems to be no response.

4. Most of us do not want to move mountains with our faith.
  5. We merely want to keep going...we want to hang on to hope.
  6. We probably can identify with the longings of Thomas.
  7. We believe...but we need help with our unbelief.
- D. We cannot help but think about the global pandemic.
1. We have already had millions of cases and thousands of deaths.
  2. There is no end in sight...weeks...now months...or years?
  3. Even Germany, which has been on top of this since the beginning, has already canceled Oktoberfest for next fall!
  4. Many parts of the planet have yet to hit their peak.
- E. So, I appreciate the perspective of one person who encourages us to live out our faith and not wait around for explanations.
1. He says: "The coronavirus-induced limitations on life arrived at the same time as Lent, the season of doing without.
    - a. "But Lent 2020 had no fixed Easter to look forward to—we had a fast—without the promise of a feast.
    - b. "And there are some who tell us why God is doing this.
    - c. "They say that it's some kind of punishment or warning.
  2. "But maybe the biblical tradition we need to turn to is lament?
    - a. "Lament is what happens when people ask, "Why?"
    - b. "Lament is when we don't get an answer to our questions.
  3. "It's where we get when we move beyond our self-centered worry about our failings and look at the suffering of the world.
  4. "In the Bible, God also laments, the Spirit groans, Jesus weeps.
  5. "It is no part of the Christian vocation to be able to explain completely what is happening and all of the reasons why.
  6. "But it is part of the Christian vocation—not to be able to explain—and instead, to lament.
  7. "As the Spirit laments within us, we become small shrines where the presence and healing love of God can dwell.
  8. "And out of that can emerge new possibilities, new acts of kindness, new scientific understanding, and new hope."

#### IV. SO, WE LIVE WITH DOUBT AND LIVE OUT OUR FAITH.

- A. Remember how the story of Thomas ends?
1. Jesus says, "Blessed are they who don't see, and yet believe."
  2. That's us—Jesus is calling us blessed when we have the courage and confidence and trust to put our lives in God's hands.
  3. We will have doubts and we will have some measure of faith.
  4. But how will we choose to use what we have?
  5. Will we let our doubts overwhelm us?
  6. Or will we use the faith that we have to bring love to the world?
  7. Right now, there is an abundance of stories that inspire us!
- B. Stanley Berry, a doctor in Detroit, was planning to retire soon.

1. But physicians were needed to treat COVID-19 patients—and not with compensation—but as volunteers.
  2. He said: “My friends discouraged me because I’m 66.”
  3. “I didn’t take this decision lightly—this could be the last thing I do on earth—especially if I get placed in the ER.
  4. “But the bravest people I have known in my lifetime knew they were going to die—and they went ahead and helped anyway.”
- C. A woman said: “Though uncertainty abounds, I can find hope too.”
1. “I don’t think God caused the virus, but I see God’s work everywhere in so many different people and places...
  2. “In every person who makes the decision to love their neighbor as themselves, in every person who is staying home even though it is not convenient, in all the health care workers who are putting themselves at risk, in every grocery store worker.
  3. “The proof of the holy is shining through in so many places.”
- D. A couple of weeks ago on Easter eve the phone rang in my office.
1. I was working on my sermon, so I almost didn’t answer.
  2. But I did and a man asked, “Are you the Governor’s pastor?”
    - a. My first impulse was to hang up.
    - b. My next was to say, “Let me give you Dr. Lowe’s number.”
    - c. But I simply said, “Yes, I am—what can I do for you?”
  3. The man was a member of one of the few churches in Kentucky that was planning to have Easter services “in person.”
    - a. He was polite and respectful and said he had a few questions.
    - b. He asked why the Governor was afraid to have services.
    - c. He began to quote lots of verses about not being afraid.
  4. I told him that I felt that fear was not the Governor’s motivation.
    - a. I mentioned a text that I memorized as a child in the King James Version from II Timothy: “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind.”
    - b. I said that I thought the Governor’s decision was grounded in love.
    - c. And I said that in his mind (which I think is very sound), based on the data he has seen, this is the best way to show our love for God and our neighbors.
  5. The man talked more and mentioned his work with recovery groups and the thousands of people who need help.
    - a. I agreed—and I jumped at the opportunity to tell him how many support groups we have meeting at our church.
    - b. And we found some common ground.
  6. I thanked him for his ministry and said, “Keep it up! Hopefully all of our churches will find more ways to help more people in Kentucky—now and after the pandemic has passed.”
  7. He said, “Amen! God bless you.” and we parted peacefully.
- E. So, we live with doubt and we live with fear...
1. And we live with love as we live out our faith.
  2. And blessed are you who have not seen...

3. But have found a way...to believe.