

Welcome!

First Congregational Church of Webster Groves
United Church of Christ



Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.

April 19, 2020



We respond to God's call by welcoming everyone regardless of ability, age, ethnicity, race, gender identity, sexual orientation or socio-economic background.

To proclaim in word and deed the love of Christ, we affirm that all may share in the full life, ministry, fellowship, responsibilities and blessing of our congregation.

No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tracey Harris, *Student Minister &
Director of Christian Education*

TOLLING OF THE BELL

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES

PRELUDE

Liebster Jesu, Wir sind hier (Beloved Jesus, We Are Here)

J. S. Bach

CALL TO WORSHIP (Tracey, Merrimon, **Both**)

Based on Psalm 16

Protect me, God,

Because I take refuge in you.

I say to the Holy One, "You are my Sovereign

Apart from you, I have nothing good.

You teach me the way of life.

In your presence is a total celebration.

Beautiful things are always in your right hand. Amen

RAISING THE COVENANT

**We who are called of God into this Christian community covenant together;
to seek to know the will of God, to experience the joy and struggle of
discipleship, to proclaim in word and deed the love of Christ, and to work
for peace and justice among all people. We trust God's promise of grace and
forgiveness and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our trials and rejoicing.**

GATHERING HYMN

Jesus Christ Is Risen Today

German carol, 15th century

Adapt. M. Praetorius

Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!
our triumphant holy day, Alleluia!
who did once, up on the cross, Alleluia!
suffer to redeem our loss, Alleluia!

Hymns of praise then let us sing, Alleluia!
unto Christ, our heavenly King, Alleluia!
who endured the cross and grave, Alleluia!
sinners to redeem and save, Alleluia!

RITUAL OF APPROACH

Tracey Harris

Within every kernel of doubt, there is a spark of life and hope.

In those times when our faith falters, when we cannot recognize the presence of the Holy among us, God takes our faith and transforms it, patiently showing us the many ways Christ walks among us. Look around you: As close as your own beating heart, and in the eyes of your nearest neighbor, grace abounds at the heart of all life. We, you and I, are all God's children, loved without condition, Be filled with that peace as we worship the Risen One. Amen

NOT FOR CHILDREN ONLY

Erick Falconer, *Youth Minister*

SHARING THE WORD

Merrimon Boyd, *Student Minister*

From the Gospels

John 20:19-29

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 Judeans. Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands

and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw Jesus. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them; “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. 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.”

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.” 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.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 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.”

Response

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the people.

Thanks be to God.

ANTHEM

Were You There?

Spiritual

MESSAGE OF THE DAY

The Courage of Thomas

Tracey Harris

All of us at some point have probably been in a car on a trip and whether it is with grown ups or children in the car, someone invariably asks, “How much farther?” “Are we there yet?” “Can we stop” and more. However, when I was a child, the question was usually, “Are we lost?” Not because my dad was not good at directions. Usually, because we were on some back road where my dad could check out the crops and see the sights in that area. His answer to us was always, “Nah, we may not know where we are but all roads lead somewhere.” As a child, that was not the reply I was looking for.

So let’s get back to the scripture where we encounter Thomas, the twin, the disciple that asks lots of questions. Somehow, and I think unfairly, he got tagged with the nickname, Doubting Thomas. Let us take a look one more time at the reading and what takes place along the way to Jesus presenting his hand and his side as proof that he is risen.

Our scripture sets the stage. John wants us to know that it was evening, the first day of the week when Jesus first came to the house where the disciples had met. A place that was locked, as the disciples hid in fear. We know what it is to be so afraid you can’t leave the house. The disciples who had been with Jesus as his companions on the journey of ministry were terrified because Jesus was dead. They were hiding in fear that they might be killed too. John says Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace, be with you,” and SHOWED them his hands and his side. Wait, this group of disciples minus Judas and Thomas, were shown Jesus’ hands and his side. Jesus greeted them with “Peace” then he showed the disciples his hands and his side. He did not even wait for them to ask. It seems as if Jesus knew he needed to make them see it really was him. Despite the fact that the women had also told them Jesus was alive. (I had to throw that in). But paralyzed by fear in this room, fear Jesus could feel, Jesus sought to reassure them. The scars on the hands and feet, just like when we have scars and stories... hey remember that time I fell off my bike and cut my knee, remember that scar... A wound to connect people who shared a history. Scars carry our stories. Notice two things from this

scripture, Judas was not present as he was dead. The other person who was absent was Thomas. So Thomas was not huddled afraid in that room, he was out doing something! Remember, he is also the one who wanted to go with Jesus to Judea when Lazarus had died and some disciples do not want to go back there because some people wanted to stone Jesus. But Thomas wants to say, why shouldn't we go? All of this seems to lead me to the conclusion that Thomas was a courageous guy!

Let us go back to the book of John and see what happens. Jesus then gives the disciples that are present the gift of breathing the Holy Spirit on them. He then must leave. The scripture then says that when Thomas comes into the room after Jesus leaves and all the disciples tell him their story, Thomas says that he won't believe it is really Jesus, unless he can see the marks of the nails and puts a finger in the mark of the nail in his hand. So a week passes and the disciples, including Thomas are in the house again. The doors again shut, and there is Jesus just standing there hanging out among them. His first words again, "Peace, be with you." Then he turns to Thomas and says, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." And in one really great profession of faith, Thomas shouts, My Lord and My God! But Jesus wants to give his friend a little nudge and says, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." What is missing here is a long shaking down of Thomas for wanting to touch the side and see the hands. No, Jesus never tells Thomas to stop being Thomas, the guy who asks questions and seeks more information. Yet he knows that Jesus is his Lord and his God. What does that mean for us? It is hard to be a follower of Jesus but if you get enough information, you might be able to make a bold statement of what you believe as does Thomas. Are doubts and questions wrong? I certainly find them very helpful. In touching those scars on Jesus' body, Thomas was dealing with the humanity of Jesus and in acknowledging Jesus as Lord and God among the disciples, Thomas spoke to the divinity of Jesus. Thomas asked questions and sometimes they may have been seemingly foolish questions but in the end? I think Thomas was courageous and got it right!! Paul Tillich says, "Doubt isn't the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith... Sometimes, I think it is my mission to bring faith to the faithless, and doubt to the faithful." This leads us to explore who we are and what beliefs fit us. Be assured that if someone tells me they have all of the answers about faith, I will have questions about that person! Questions reorder our beliefs and help us know what is important to us about God.

Today, my dad still enjoys going off the main road to see the sights and learn new things from his trips. When I was a child, my dad's calm demeanor and reliable answer to my questions meant that those trips were never scary and lent themselves to a sense of adventure instead. I learned that he was very happy when we, kids, asked questions about what we could see from the car. We all know how many questions kids can ask especially when you are in a car or quarantined but our challenge is to recognize questions help us grow as children or adults. So feel free to ask your questions that help you grow and understand who God is to you. Feel free to be a Courageous Thomas! We may not be able to touch the hands and the side but we can ask lots of questions! Peace, be with you, as you step out of fear and into faith with all its questions and doubts. All shall be well. Amen

PRAYER HYMN

The Day of Resurrection

John of Damascus, 8th century

Transl. J. M. Neale

The day of resurrection! Earth tell it out abroad;
the Passover of gladness, the Passover of God.
From death to life eternal, from earth unto the sky,
our Christ has brought us over with hymns of victory.

Now let the heavens be joyful, let earth its song begin,
the whole world keep high triumph, and all that is therein;
Let all things seen and unseen their notes of gladness blend,
for Christ again has risen, our joy that has no end.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

We Lift Our Joys and Concerns to God

Please remember the following as you pray, today:

Joyce Berger

Marshall Brooks

The Rev. Dr. Paul Davis, in rehab after a bout with poor health

Margaret Gustafson

Bob Moody, at home and recovering well after being hospitalized for complications from chemotherapy

The Rev. Jack Newsome

Becky Scott

***Jaymie Woodsmall and all the health care workers, first responders, and delivery and grocery workers
people living with Covid-19
people who are isolated and alone***

Prayer of the Day

Prayer of Our Savior

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come;
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not
into temptation but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the
power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

BENEDICTION

Follow God's lead into new life!

Recognize Jesus in unexpected places.

He is here!

Christ is Risen!

May you dance an alleluia dance,

And sing a resurrection song.

Laugh with God and let joy reside in your hearts always. Amen

POSTLUDE

Agincourt Hymn

J. Dunstable



10 West Lockwood Avenue
Webster Groves, MO 63119
314-962-0475
www.FirstChurchWG.org

Contact Information

Moderator
Mark Edwards
marke@wustl.edu

Pastor
Rev. David A. Denoon
DDenoon@FirstChurchWG.org

Office Administrator
Debbie Tolstoi
Admin@FirstChurchWG.org

Director of Music & Organist
Dr. Leon Burke
Leon.Burke@FirstChurchWG.org

Director of Christian Education
Tracey Harris
Tracey.Harris@FirstChurchWG.org

Coordinator of Youth Ministries &
Assistant Music Director
Dr. Erick Falconer
Erick.Falconer@FirstChurchWG.org

Facilities Manager
Chip Isringhaus
cti1234@FirstChurchWG.org

Custodian
Darrell Lakies

Assistant Custodian
Gus McLean

Director, Center for Counseling & Healing
Rev. Linda E. Smith, BCRN, LCSW, HTCP/I
lesrhs@sbcglobal.net

Director of MICA
Rev. Cliff Aerie
cliff.aerie@gmail.com

Student Minister
Merrimon Boyd
mboyd@eden.edu

Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.

Follow us on

Facebook

www.facebook.com/FirstChurchWG/

Sound Cloud

www.soundcloud.com/firstchurchwg

You Tube

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZO7v1QNm6FIFiJRAzCLapA>

