

Easter 2A – April 19, 2020
 Text: John 20:19-31
 Trinity Lutheran Church, Fairview Village
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Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Some of us have heard this story over and over again. For others, we are hearing it for the first time. Earlier this week, I had the opportunity to meet with Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis on Zoom. Her passion is the Gospel of John, and that conversation made me think about how today's Gospel might be heard and experienced in 2020.

When it was evening on Friday the 13th, 2020, it was the first day of many days we stayed home and sheltered in place. And the doors of our homes were locked for fear of the Coronavirus, but Jesus entered and stood among us and said, "Peace be with you."

And as he said this, he breathed into us and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Every time we lock ourselves away like the disciples did, for fear of those in power, Jesus will show up to remind us of one thing. Jesus will always show up. Jesus will meet us exactly where we are, every time we are in need.

He finds us when we are weeping like Mary. He finds us when we are locked away in fear like the disciples. He will find us when we are back to our regular lives, post-Coronavirus, when we find ourselves back to our normal day-to-day routines.

Maybe today, you feel like you really need to see the Lord. Just like Thomas. It isn't that you don't believe, you just need the comfort of the experience. Mary saw the Lord. The disciples saw the Lord. And we want to see the Lord.

Perhaps this story sounds different than other times you've heard it. Our circumstances are very different this year. We are the ones behind locked doors. Locked in to stay healthy. Or locked in with those who are sick. Locked in because we need our wages. Locked in with no wages.

There is a bit of unknown in our world right now. A tiny virus wreaking havoc on everything we know. Our economy, our livelihoods, our present. Our future. A tiny virus that seems to have a lot of power.

So we can relate a bit to what it feels like to be locked in. To desperately want to get out, but at the same time, knowing we are locked in to our situation.

Thomas missed the revelation of Jesus that day. And sometimes, we do, too.

Jesus promises to be in relationship with us, no matter what. But when we are scared, we don't always cling to that promise. We are just as likely as Thomas to experience FOMO, fear of missing out. Mary and the disciples had their moment of relationship with Jesus. Perhaps instead of doubting, Thomas just wanted that moment of relationship, too.

The Lord comes back and brings his greeting of peace. Seeing is believing for Thomas. Jesus meets him where he is, in his need to see Jesus for himself. He cries out, My Lord, My God. And now, he, too can say he has seen the Lord.

When we doubt, isn't it possible that we just need to see the Lord, too? That in that moment of locked-away fear and dread, we need to be reminded that Jesus will always come and find us – and release us from what binds us and locks us away?

Yes, it is 2020 and the coronavirus is a real thing. We can't ignore it, or pretend it doesn't exist. We can't relax our efforts to shelter in place. Just because we may not have seen it for ourselves, doesn't mean it is not present in our world. It is okay to be scared. It is okay to want to avoid hearing about it. It is okay to grieve the loss of people, and it is okay to grieve the loss of events in your life that are not happening because of this virus. Most of all, it is okay to not be okay.

Remember that we have an advocate, the Holy Spirit. Breathed into us by Jesus, so that we may always be claimed and loved as children of God. So that we know that God is right here. Right now.

A tiny virus cannot undo what God has intended for you and for me. Life. Even if our lungs collapse at the end of our earthly journey, we have a God who breathes the promise of eternal life back into us. Ventilators and viruses cannot keep us from God's love. Masks and gloves cannot protect us from receiving God's grace. Jesus is the gate that opens us beyond our earthly fears into all that awaits us.

Living. Loving. Serving our Neighbor.

We are not left alone in our fear, but we are sent to serve. Even as we find ourselves locked into sheltering in place, we can live in the confidence of Christ's promise and love and serve our neighbor.

You already are. Some are making masks. Some are calling our friends and family and church members to check in on them. Some are donating food to food pantries. Some are volunteering to feed people at the Norristown Soup Kitchen, the Community Dinner, Daily Bread Community Food pantry. Some are praying. Some are working. Some are staying home so that we can stay healthy and not overwhelm the hospital systems.

Peace be with you. Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis says peace is the promise of Jesus's presence. Do not let your hearts be troubled by the things of this world.

I know how hard it is to actually do that. I struggle, too when anxiety takes hold.

Yet Christ's peace is with you. And with me. And Christ will go through locked rooms and doors and gates and whatever systems we devise to protect ourselves....so that we may find comfort in his presence. Joy in his promise. And peace that surpasses every single thing we think we understand.

And so, on April 19, 2020 we shelter in place. And we shelter in God's peace. Peace – the very presence of Christ – is already with you. Amen.