

What a difference a week makes! We have certainly seen that as the numbers of Covid-19 confirmed cases rise from week to week. In the beginning we witness a few cases and are still skeptical of the escalation the public health experts predicted and now each week, we see the evidence of how contagious and deadly this disease is.

And, here we are – one week after Easter! Easter Sunday usually brings a lot of special worship experiences with trumpets and choirs and flower crosses to proclaim that Chris is risen. Even with our virtual worship experiences, pastors and worship leaders went over the top to bring a special digital worship experience. And, now, one week later, we slip back into the “normal” weekly worship.

It almost seems like if you didn’t tune in to any of the Easter worship videos, you missed out on the special proclamation of the Risen King. But, don’t fret...if you got caught up in *Tiger King* or *Ice Road Truckers* instead, the great thing about our digital world is that you can find any of the wonderful worship videos online. Don’t feel bad for being late to the party.

Because, really, we were all late to the original party – the first Easter happened a mere two thousand years ago – and we all missed it. Even some of the disciples missed it, Thomas in particular. According to John, Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene on Easter morning. Of course, she goes and tells them what happened, and Jesus then appears to some of the disciples that evening. Unfortunately, Thomas wasn’t there at the time. He missed out on experiencing Easter for himself.

Until a week later. Jesus returns to the disciples, who are still locked away in

their room, but Thomas IS there this time. All of the disciples receive exactly what they need from Jesus. At the first appearance, Jesus gives them peace, joy, the power of forgiveness, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus knew they needed that in order to equip them for their call in sharing the good news. Jesus also gives Thomas exactly what he needs – proof and assurance. Even in their brief time of separation from crucifixion to resurrection, Jesus still knows exactly what they need and gives it to them.

What struck me in the John passage is that it was a week later when Jesus returned and appeared to Thomas. Why was it a week? What was Jesus doing for those seven days? Can you imagine what Thomas had to live with for that week? They had already experienced a wide range of emotions and yet Thomas had to live with the fact that he missed the Risen Christ.

If you remember back in the Lazarus story, Thomas was the one who said, “Let us also go, so that we may die with him.”¹ He was ready and willing to pay the ultimate price with Jesus then, but now, he somehow missed the boat. I can imagine the self-doubt and self-loathing that probably began to build day-after-day, as he was turning over the details of where he was and what he was doing that really wasn’t that important for him to miss Jesus.

Jesus knows that we all come to Christ in our own time. That’s why there’s no guilt or condemning from Jesus. He knows that those tactics don’t work. Jesus is patient and gives us the time we need to come to Christ on our own. Perhaps Thomas needed just a little more time, so that he could explore and process his inner

¹ John 11:16

conflict. Perhaps there was something unspoken stirring in Thomas's heart that only Jesus knew about, so Jesus gave him the time he needed to sit with that. Whatever it was, Thomas just needed a little more time, so that his mind would be open to see the evidence. The longing in his heart would be strong enough to be assured by his own personal experience of the Resurrected Christ.

Jesus knows that it takes as long as it takes, for Thomas and for us. When the time comes, Jesus comes to us and gives us exactly what we need while we are fearfully behind locked doors...a living hope. Peter sums it up nicely in verse 3: "By his great mercy, he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." We are all searching for a newness that is "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading," (v.4) especially right now.

In this time of uncertainty and loss, we are feeling tired and stuck, just waiting for the next thing to happen. We all desperately want our lives back to normal where we can go to work or the grocery store without wearing masks and gloves. We want something that we can count on, that won't die, that is pure and lasts. Christ gives us that -- hope that is alive, pure, and eternal. We cling to this hope in Christ that life is not going to always be like this. We will get through this and experience a new birth within ourselves and the world. We will receive a new life that is "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading," (v.4).

Some say that hope can be dangerous. It can be, if we put our hope in something or someone other than Christ. If we put our hope in a person to make things better, we will be disappointed when they aren't able to fulfill their promises. If we

put our hope in ourselves to turn things around in our own power, we will eventually let ourselves down. We often rely on "false hope" that can never give us what we truly need. Sometimes we just cling to hope, that things will magically get better, but then we don't do any action ourselves to help bring about the healing of ourselves or the world. In these cases, hope can be dangerous, and truthfully, putting our hope in Christ can be dangerous too.

When we put our hope and trust in Christ, we will be called into action. As soon as the disciples experience the resurrection in Christ in this passage, they are immediately commissioned for service. And, that can be dangerous to our complacent lives. When the Holy Spirit breathes into our lives, we are raised out of our graves and want to serve the Risen Lord. We rise to the occasion by the living hope of the resurrection to be the hands and feet of Christ.

Sometimes we try so desperately to keep Christ out of our lives. We hide behind fearfully locked doors, but nothing keeps out God's grace. We may be able to lock out others, but not Christ. When it's the right time, Christ comes to us and gives us exactly what we need, and we respond by sharing this living hope with others.

How have you shared this living hope this week or this past month? I invite you to share it in the Comments below this video. Amen.

A Living Hope
John 20:19-29 & 1 Peter 1:3-9
Rev. Kristie Grimaud
April 19, 2020