

Sermon Text – Sunday, April 5, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: Acts 2:14-32; 2nd Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9
Scripture for Message: John 20:19-31 “Joyful”

I want to share with you some “Great Truths About Life That Little Children Have Learned.”

1. No matter how hard you try you cannot baptize a cat.
2. When your mom is mad at your dad, don't let her brush your hair.
3. Never ask your 3-year-old brother to hold an egg or a tomato.
4. You can't trust dogs to watch your food for you.
5. Don't sneeze when someone is cutting your hair.
6. School lunches stick to the wall.
7. You can't hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk.
8. Never wear polka-dot underwear under white shorts, no matter how cute the underwear is.

It is virtually certain that the children learned these “great truths” and came to these bold new insights after some dramatic eye-opening experience in their own personal lives. Imagine some child trying to baptize the family cat, which is one experience that will quickly teach you it is just not a good thing to do. Here's the point, a dramatic personal eye-opening experience can give us new insight, new perception, and new vision.

On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples had an eye-opening experience, and it changed their outlook forever. When they were all together, Jesus came and stood among them, he showed them his hands and side, allowing them to touch him. They heard about his resurrection from the women, but this was irrefutable proof that Jesus was truly risen in physical form. We learned last week – that is not something that happens in the natural world – people do not “rise” from the grave. Yes, this was a dramatic eye-opening and earth-shaking experience for them. I guess that is what it took for them to “see” him as the Messiah.

Before we get to the story of “doubting Thomas” we should explore this first of Jesus' visits to the disciples, when Thomas wasn't present. Jesus came and stood among the disciples and said, “Peace be with you!” That seems to be one of Jesus' typical

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greetings and reminds us of when Jesus was with them in the upper room.

The last time they were all together Jesus said to them, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). Jesus offers them peace possibly to calm their fears – he does not offer peace as we expect it. Jesus’ peace is not lack of conflict or a world where everyone gets along like neighbors. Jesus tells them, “As the father has sent me, I am sending you.” To me this indicates that God calls the disciples to continue Jesus’ mission – bringing peace to those who are marginalized and oppressed. “Jesus’ peace invites the lion to see the lamb as neighbor and friend, the Jew to speak with the Samaritan, and the prostitute to dine with the Pharisee.”¹ This type of peacemaking is what got Jesus killed and now he expects his followers to follow in his footsteps, along that same path. For that mission, they would need peace.

We know that God sent Jesus to sacrifice self for God’s purposes. God sent him to overturn the existing status-quo, to reconcile us to God, to stand for the oppressed and marginalized in God’s creation. God sent Jesus to “speak truth to power” and Jesus obediently went to the cross. When we begin to discuss Jesus’ mission, it leads to thinking about what we, as followers of Christ, are sent to complete. Jesus sent the Apostles not only to fulfill his mission but also sent in the same manner as he himself was sent. Jesus hints at what that will mean when he tells James and John they would “indeed drink from [his] cup.” To me, Jesus’ statement makes it clear that the path to follow him will not be an easy path to travel. Jesus sent his disciples to do the work of reconciliation and renewal – continuing the work that got Jesus killed.

Maybe because Jesus knew the journey would be a difficult one for his followers, he brings them reassurance. Maybe to ensure they truly believed he came to them revealing a body that suffered yet still lives. They too were suffering and Jesus gave them what they needed. Everyone has troubles and trials, but a Christian’s suffering is two-fold. We suffer in a broken world because we know there is a better way, and because we believe that Jesus saves us from the

¹ Kristin Johnston Lagen. “John 20:19-23 “Theological Perspective.” *Feasting on the Gospels: John, Vol 2.* eds. Cynthia Jarvis & Elizabeth Johnson. WJK. 2015. Print. 320-324

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troubles of this world, we experience the pain of suffering in a deeper way. Jesus, however, does not promise we would not suffer.

John tells us that the disciples were overjoyed when they saw his hands and the wound on his side. Jesus came to them scars and all. Jesus came to his disciples despite their being in locked rooms – a lock on a door could not keep him away. His words to Thomas, “Stop doubting and believe” are important words for us as well. Jesus told Thomas, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” It’s all too easy to say “stop doubting and believe” but I wonder if our doubt causes our questions to lead us into stronger faith. In other words, when we seek answers to our questions and doubts, Jesus comes to us even through locked doors breathing new life through the Holy Spirit and offering His peace. The message for us is that we can have joy like the disciples because Jesus’ wounds bear witness to the worst that the world can do and witness to the fact that the worst is overcome. What remains to be feared?

I wonder if there are some in the church who have a problem with doubt. These verses in John’s Gospel sometimes are interpreted as a condemnation of Thomas. “Doubting Thomas” is turned into a derogatory phrase to shame people who question the status-quo. Notice that Jesus is not offended by Thomas’s doubts, Jesus accepts Thomas’s doubt and offers proof that he is who he appears to be – Jesus in the flesh with all the scars inflicted on him in life. Jesus does not come to them asking why they are still hiding behind closed / locked doors – he comes and offers peace.

Stop doubting and believe is not a condemnation of doubt but reassurance that Jesus fulfills the promise of God. Jesus grants Thomas’s wish by inviting him to touch and put his hand in the wounds. It is the acceptance of the reality of Jesus’ presence that causes Thomas to say, “My Lord and my God!” Of all the disciples, Thomas may have been the most realistic in his faith. Thomas is the one who willingly joins Jesus as they head for Judea when Lazarus dies, even though it might mean death for them all. Thomas is the one who questions Jesus when Jesus tells the disciples, “You know the way to the place where I am going” (John 14:4). Thomas is the only one who had courage enough to seek confirmation of the truth, a truth that would dispel doubt.

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Thomas was not a perfect person with perfect faith. Probably a lot more like any of us that we would want to admit. For those who struggle with doubt it's OK because Jesus does not condemn doubt. Like Thomas we can question Jesus, we can have questions about what we read in scripture because that is how we get to know who Jesus is for us and who God is as he is revealed in Jesus' life. I wonder if faith is not made stronger because we sometimes struggle with doubt. Don't let others tell you that your doubt indicates a lack of faith. Maybe more Christians need to be like Thomas and seek the answers to the questions that nag at them. In order to have strong faith you need to get to know Jesus. Faith is not a series of beliefs but the process of getting to know another – in this case getting to know God.

We cannot judge Thomas for doubting; we cannot judge that he is not perfect in his faith because he has questions. We cannot judge the disciples who waited in that locked room and who needed to see Jesus wounds before feeling joyful. We cannot judge those in our society who also have questions – as Christians we should encourage the questions. We should show them our scars that prove Jesus lives and God is present in the world today. We all have scars that we shouldn't try to hide – it is the scars that reveal the miracle of new life and renewal through belief in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God.

The mission of this church is not meant for the perfect people of the world, although those who believe they are perfect probably need the church as much as anyone else. Our mission belongs to those who feel they are least worthy, to the broken, doubtful, and marginalized people of the world, the ones with scars. The church should be reaching out to anyone the world judges, anyone who may doubt their worth, anyone who experiences virtual crucifixion at the hands of members in their community. You know who I am talking about. Just as Jesus went to his disciples, showing the wounds inflicted by the authorities and saying "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." The mission of the church is that Jesus sends us just as the Father sent Jesus to continue Jesus' peace-giving mission beyond the cross. May it be so.