

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Open up! Open up! It's me. Peter and John scurry to the door,
lift the heavy bar bolted across it and swing it wide.

Joanna hurries in with her basket weighed down with food.

As soon as she is in the room, the door slams shut and the bar returns
to its resting place. Were you seen? Were you followed?

Anxious eyes peer out the window to the street below.

Did you disguise your accent so they wouldn't know
you were a Galilean?

The disciples are nearly paralyzed with fear and for good reason.

Their leader, their teacher, Jesus, has been executed by crucifixion
just two days ago. The crowds of Jews flocking the streets
due to the Passover celebration with one voice demanded

his execution from Pontius Pilate. And who knows if they would
stop with just killing Jesus? Any one of them could be next.

They didn't have a good reason to kill Jesus.

What would stop them from killing the whole lot of them,
especially if it pleased the crowd.

The disciples were frantic. What do they do now? Jesus is dead.

The one they had followed and shared everything with these last few
years had been brutally tortured and murdered as an innocent man.

If their fear didn't keep them in that upper room,

their overwhelming grief sapped them of strength to do anything
else but stay there. Do they wait until the festival is over

and try to head back north to Galilee and return to their fishing?

Will they even be safe there? All their hopes had ridden
on Jesus. What do they do now that he is no longer with them?

On Sunday, the first day of the week, into this room fraught with grief
and laden with fear, Jesus came. The risen Christ came and stood
among his disciples, his dear friends. And his words to them
spoke to all the fear and pain encapsulated within them

and within that room. “Peace be with you” he said. Shalom.
A peace that makes war to cease. A peace that brings
total well-being to heart and soul and mind.
A peace that heals divisions and torn relationships.
A peace that brings you & me into the very presence of God.

Jesus showed them his hands and his side, pierced by the nails
and the sword, and the disciples rejoiced and believed
that he was their risen Lord. With this peace Jesus breathed on them
the Holy Spirit, the same spirit that guided him in his ministry.
And then Jesus sends them out in the power of that same Spirit
to love and forgive and continue his work in his holy name.
And thus, the church is born.

But of course, one of their number wasn't there. Thomas didn't see
Jesus pass through the locked door and come into the room.
Thomas didn't hear Jesus' words or see the wounds in his hands
and his side. How was he to know that the rest of them
hadn't become delusional. The last time he had seen Jesus
was perhaps his labored march through the streets of Jerusalem
to Golgotha or already nailed and bleeding on the cross.
Jesus was dead, plain and simple.
No amount of wishful thinking was going to bring him back.
Thomas, like any of us, would question what the others saw.

Yet on that next Sunday, the first day of the week, Thomas is with
the other disciples in the upper room when Jesus again comes
into their midst. The risen Lord comes among them offering
his peace. And to Thomas, he gives him the chance to see
and believe. Put your finger here and see my hands.
Reach out your hand and put it in my side.
Do not doubt but believe. Thomas does believe and utters
the most profound statement of belief recorded in the Gospel
of John. He proclaims Jesus as his Lord and his God.
Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God,

and equal to God the Father himself.

On this Sunday, the first day of the week, Jesus comes into our midst as his disciples and says, "Peace be with you." He offers us his peace for our bodies, souls and our minds. He offers us a peace that can make wars to cease, that can heal divisions and torn relationships. And then instead of showing us his hands and his side where he was pierced, he invites us to this table where we take his flesh and his blood in our hands to eat. His body broken, his blood poured out on our behalf. And through this we are forgiven and are one with our Lord.

The question for us is do we recognize that the risen Christ is among us and rejoice and believe. Or is there a part of you that is more like Thomas that still needs some signs in order to see and believe? Has doubt crept in?

In what part of your life do you house fear?
Where have you barricaded yourself off / shut yourself down?
What are you afraid of? Afraid of not measuring up,
afraid of being alone, afraid of not being loved, afraid of dying,
afraid of making too many mistakes, afraid of what the future holds.

No matter what your fear is, Jesus enters your room and there proclaims his peace. He breathes on you anew his Holy Spirit and with it forgiveness and newness of life.
The risen Christ has conquered death and with it everything that tries to defeat and overpower you.

And then Jesus turns to you and gives you signs in order for you to see them and believe. Not begrudgingly but out of love, he gives you what you need in order to keep on growing in your faith. What are the signs that you need to see in order to believe?
Can you trust Jesus to show them to you? If Jesus was willing to come back and show Thomas his hands and his side

in order for him to believe, do you doubt that Jesus would do the same thing for you? Do you not know that he loves you just as much?

This past week I have been down. Perhaps part of it was due to being tired after Holy Week and Easter Sunday, but I know it was more than that. By the time I got to Friday, I had all but barricaded myself in my house refusing to come out and do anything else. I stayed there Friday and Saturday barely venturing out. I could count on one hand the number of conversations I had with others. I had pretty much locked myself up just like those disciples had in the upper room.

But then as I worked on the sermon and looked back at my week, I saw signs of the risen Christ coming to me and offering me his peace. A close friend stopped by the church, not once, but twice this week and spent time with me. Another friend who I hadn't heard from in 6 months called me out of the blue to check on me. These and others were signs to me to believe and trust in God. Christ has conquered death and any other trial that I might face. My hope and trust can be in nothing except Jesus the risen Lord.

Christ comes to us today in bread and wine, in his holy word, in the presence of one another, and in the beauty of life around us and offers us his peace amid our many fears. May your eyes be opened to see the signs of Jesus' presence with you that you may believe and trust in him.