

SERMON FOR APRIL 19, 2020
TEXT: JOHN 20: 31
THEME: EASTER REALITIES

These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, in order that by believing you will have life in His name.

In the name of Jesus:

I have heard from more than one person last week that it doesn't seem like Easter. When I asked why it didn't seem like Easter the typical response was that people haven't been able to go to church. They haven't had the experience that they have enjoyed in past years. With churches being closed due to Pandemic Christians haven't been able to receive palms on Palm Sunday, they haven't been able to attend church on the three most holiest days of the year for the Christian, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter. Instead we all have been experiencing different yet all too common realities to all of us: social distancing, wearing of face masks, and the cancellation of all of the things we have held so dear to us.

Now many of you who have been watching our services have mentioned how much you appreciate this medium particularly in times such as these. Your kind words and thanks are appreciated. It looks like worshipping via Facebook and YouTube has become the new normal,

the new reality. But as a pastor, it feels incredibly, unsatisfactory and unsatisfying. Worshipping on television just can't replicate the real thing, the reality of coming together to worship as the family of God, it doesn't replace the singing of hymns in praise of God, it can't replace the communion of saints that fellowship every Sunday, and we certainly can't commune together to receive the Body and Blood of Christ around the altar. No, this just isn't the same. Something is missing, and it is the physical reality of being with one another.

The fact remains, however, that even though we can't meet together, Easter is still an ongoing reality. The celebration of Easter is not just a one-day event for the Christian. In the liturgical calendar that we follow, the Easter season lasts for seven weeks, so in reality we are all still celebrating Easter. And not only that, but each Sunday is a mini celebration of the resurrection of our Lord. So Easter is an ongoing celebration. And God's Good News for you today is that Easter is not just an experience, nor is it a mere symbol of our faith, but celebration of Easter and the resurrection of Jesus is an ongoing reality for you and everyone.

This is something that the Apostle Thomas came to understand. The Gospel lesson for today is the familiar account of Thomas doubting

that the Lord Jesus actually rose from the grave. This Gospel lesson is the appointed lesson to be read every Sunday after Easter, and it is repeated yearly, I believe, for this Gospel lesson reveals to not only Thomas but to each and everyone of us that Easter is an ongoing reality, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ not only took place almost 2000 years ago, but in Jesus' resurrection God gives us a new reality, that Jesus Christ has truly conquered sin, death, and hell for us and because He has risen from the grave, we really do have hope for today forever.

The news of Jesus' resurrection initially stunned Thomas. He wasn't into sentimentality. He knew that Jesus died on the cross, and the hard, cruel reality is that once you are dead, in Thomas' real world, you aren't coming back to life. That is why he met the news of Jesus' resurrection with doubt and skepticism. Thomas proclaimed: "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

The resurrected Jesus changed Thomas' thinking, his faith, and his life. Jesus said to Thomas: "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas' worldview, his reality was rocked! Here was a previously cold as dead laid in the tomb Jesus now alive in the flesh.

Thomas could not only see Jesus but feel Him as well, placing his hands into the nail holes of Jesus' hands and side. This was not sentimentality or a symbol Thomas was seeing, He was seeing the reality of God's love for His creation in the resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ from the grave.

Easter for you and me is not a sentimental celebration, but a celebration of the reality that Jesus Christ has raised, is raised and will always be raised from the grave. He was alive then, He lives for now and will always be alive forever. He lives for you and me, in our ever-present reality of a Pandemic that seemingly has no end.

Oh how we need and how the world needs Jesus today! In the reality we live in we see fear in the eyes of medical workers seeking to help those who are sick. There is an anxiety in the lives of people who are trying to live healthy lives in the hope that they don't get sick. We see on the television cities where hospitals and morgues are filled to capacity, we have an economy that has gone south, and each of us are reminded how fragile life is, not just the life of others, but how mortal we are as well. Daily we face the reality that at some time in the future each of us will die, if not from a virus, then from some other malady. The Bible once again proves to be true, the wages of sin is death, and

even though we have tried to divert our attention from death the reality is that you and I will die. That is the reality. As this virus continues to spread, we are confronted with the problem Thomas faced, either the resurrection of Jesus is a hoax and not worthy of our time and attention, or the reality that Jesus is alive and we need to change. It is as Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth: “ if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.” (1 Corinthians 15).

But the fact, the reality is that Jesus in fact did come back from the dead. This reality shatters our present realities and changes our beliefs, our lives, and our relationships. The resurrection of Jesus is ultimately truer and more lasting than anything we have experienced in life. And Thomas and the rest of the Apostles want you to know that and believe in the reality of the risen Christ! Thomas was moved to exclaim: “My Lord and my God.” John was moved by the Holy Spirit to write: These

things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, in order that by believing you will have life in His name. “

The reality of a Pandemic pales in comparison to the reality of the empty tomb. And even as each of us faces a different reality and way of life in the future, we have this assurance: Christ has risen from the grave. He lives for you today. He loves you. He forgives you. He is with you now and always. And because of His resurrection, we have the certainty of His help in the times of our need in this life, but also the hope and reality of eternal life with Christ.

Amen.