

Sermon: **REACHING FOR JESUS**

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Saint Matthew's UMC

April 23, 2017

It was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the people. Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As God has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

—John 21.19-31

Into the locked rooms of your troubled heart Jesus comes and says, "Peace be with you." Behind those closed doors in all of your doubts and fears, all of your losses and grief, your guilt and your struggles, all of your shame and all of your dread, Jesus stands right in the middle of that and says, "Peace be with you."

Into our bloodied streets, our overcrowded prisons in the midst of ICE raids and detention centers, in gang-riddled neighborhoods in Mexico, in slave ships out in the South Pacific harvesting shrimp, in all sorts of places where children are trafficked, streets of Aleppo and Mosul, Jesus comes, the rabbi with the holes in his hands and says, "Peace be with you."

And there is a little bit of Thomas in all of us. The little Thomas that says, "I wish I could believe that but I need more." There's that 21st century American skeptic that says, "Well, the stories of resurrection are lovely theological fables. It's a great story but I don't actually expect to

meet Jesus in the flesh. It's not *that* kind of story." There's that Thomas in us that's a little skeptical of Jesus the miracle worker walking on water, raising the dead. Those stories are too old, and little too flashy for our enlightened minds. There's that Thomas in us that's not quite ready to go there.

But there's another Thomas in you, the Thomas that actually knows Jesus. Never mind all those fancy theological things that they say about him. This Thomas means actually Jesus, that teacher who is so close to God, who so clearly reveals this divine wisdom and lays it out there so that we can get our hands on it. This Jesus who actually *does* heal and forgive us, that Jesus who has this amazing clarity of light, we want that Jesus. There is that Thomas in you that doesn't say, "I can't believe" or "I won't believe," just "I need more. I need more." Don't make fun of that Thomas. He's right.

There is that Thomas in you who is hungry for Jesus, hungry for the beloved, hungry for the presence of God in real form, hungry for that love of God that loves you so much that God will suffer for you and has the scars to prove it. There is that Thomas in you that wants to reach out and see those scars because that's how you know how deep that love is.

There's a Thomas in you that wants, gruesome as it is, to behold the scars of your own betrayal and to hear the one who bears those scars, invite your embrace and say those miraculous words, "Peace be with you." Because there is a Thomas in you that wants to be raised from the dead as real and physical and absolute as Jesus was. There is a Thomas in you that reaches out for that life, that beloved, that belovedness of yours.

Never mind all your intelligent skepticism. Never mind how embarrassing it might be to fall for such a Jesus. Listen to Thomas. He's right. That beloved presence is right there. Thomas is not waiting for proof. He just wants more. Honor that Thomas in you who wants more of Jesus. And in the closed rooms and the locked doors even of your doubt Jesus will come and say those resurrecting words over and over. "Peace be with you."