



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Second Sunday of Easter, April 19, 2020

by Garland F. Pierce

Easter Seeing is Easter Believing

John 20:19-31

20:19 When 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 Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

20:20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

20:21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

20:22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

20:23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

20:24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

20:25 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."

20:26 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."

20:27 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."

20:28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

20:29 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."

20:30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

20:31 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.

According to the World Health Organization, the preeminent, international health-related research and policy-making institution, the estimated number of people visually impaired in the world is 285 million, 39 million blind and 246 million having low vision. For these, how do they understand the old saying, "Seeing is believing?" How do they hear and understand this passage from John?

The gospel of John tells us that Mary Magdalene heard him say her name and then she saw the risen Christ. She went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord."

On that Easter evening, as the disciples practiced social distancing from behind locked door for fear of the Jews, Jesus appeared to the disciples and bid them Peace. The risen Christ commissioned and sent them as he had been sent, breathing on them the Holy Spirit. Along with the power of the Holy Spirit seemed to come the power to forgive. The disciples declared to their colleague, Thomas, who, for some reason, missed all of this, "We have seen the Lord." Thomas responded, "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." Thomas perhaps had seen the crucified and dying Lord; now, if Mary and his fellow disciples have seen the risen Lord, he would have to see him too in order to believe.

A week later, Thomas would get his chance. Same house and in the same manner with the same words, Jesus enters, bidding peace. Thomas sees. Thomas touches Jesus' hand and side. And Thomas believes, declaring, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

The crucifixion causes me to tremble; but, this passage causes me to wonder. Is seeing believing? Why does Jesus bid his followers "Peace" at Easter? Do questions and doubt only incubate fear or do they ever feed faith? Pontius Pilate asked, "What is truth?" This passage causes me to humbly ask, "What is seeing? What is knowing? What is believing?"

The risen Christ spoke peace to followers who sheltered in place as the threat of death lurked all around. The risen Christ also commissioned them and empowered them with the Holy Spirit. The same risen Christ gave them power to forgive.

Maybe questions can inform and strengthen an Easter faith. Asking questions of a system that treats you as less than can strengthen your conviction that the psalmist's words are true, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Maybe the risen Christ knows that we need to hear his words of peace to calm us and reassure us when the threat of harm and death is in the very air we breathe. Maybe seeing is less with the eyes and more with the heart. Maybe this kind of seeing is experiencing the risen Lord. Maybe seeing is perceiving the new life that is promised. Maybe seeing in this way is what would make some of the family members of the Mother Emanuel 9 not

just see a racist, hate-filled killer but perceive brokenness and hurt in need of a living Savior. Maybe forgiveness can usher in new life. Maybe this kind of Easter seeing leads to Easter believing. If my wonderings are anywhere close to being right, then I can join the Easter chorus, "I have seen the Lord." And I believe.

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, then honestly share or reflect on any instances this week when you "saw" or perceived the risen Christ or the power and new life of Easter. You may wish to repeat this phrase, "Christ is Risen! I have seen the Lord"

PRAY: God of peace, while the fear of the disciples cowering behind their locked doors can be felt in a much more literal way for so many of us this year, we are reminded that we often hide behind locked doors of many kinds out of fear, distrust, and anxiety. Be with those of Asian descent who face persecution and hate crimes in the United States and elsewhere because of the inaccurate association of the coronavirus with China. Protect those for whom locked doors cannot provide safety because their greatest threats come from among their own family members. Fill all of your children with a deep understanding of your peace, your shalom, which represents more than just the absence of struggle, but points to the wholeness and restoration that you desire for all creation.

God of relationship, you send us out to fulfill your mission in the world, bringing comfort to the afflicted and hope to the hopeless. Raise up among us creative and faithful people who can address the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of all people during this time of global confusion and uncertainty. Help us to resist the temptation to withdraw our connections and support of one another. Remind us that sin is being turned inward, and put our focus on our neighbors and the well-being of our communities.

God of creation, so often we sneer at Thomas for his lack of faith and demand for empirical evidence. Remind us of the many times we have failed to act despite the evidence before our eyes. Even in the midst of international crisis, keep us mindful of other crises like climate change. Help us to see in Thomas not just a cynic to be pitied, but an example of how important it is for us to maintain a proper balance of science and faith as we move forward in our responses to the needs of your children and your world.

God of hope, your love for us surpasses anything we could ask, imagine, or even perceive. Open our eyes to the evidence of your presence in this world that we encounter every day, even in the midst of pain, suffering, and loss. We pause together as nations and families to show gratitude for those who risk their lives to serve others. Make us your hands and feet in the world, O God, so that, upon seeing our faithfulness, others might recognize your presence and bring glory to your name. In the name of the risen Christ, we pray, *Amen*.

Adapted from www.worldinprayer.org

ACT:

1. Write down or share a question about faith that you may have. Try to find the answer, by searching the scriptures, reading other religious literature, or asking folks who are knowledgeable in the faith whom you trust.
2. Refer to the youth and family activity that accompanies this devotion.

Song:

My Faith Looks Up to Thee
AMEC Hymnal, #41

1. My faith looks up to Thee, Thou Lamb of Cal-va-ry, Sa-vior di-vine!
Now hear me while I pray; take all my guilt a-way,
O let me from this day be whol-ly Thine.
2. May Thy rich grace im-part Strength to my faint-ing heart, My zeal in-spire;
As Thou hast died for me, O may my love to Thee
Pure, warm, and change-less be, A liv-ing fire!
3. While life's dark maze I tread, And griefs a-round me spread, Be Thou my guide;
Bid dark-ness turn to day, Wipe sor-row's tears a-way,
Nor let me ev-er stray From Thee a-side.
4. When ends life's tran-sient dream, When death's cold, sul-len stream Shall o'er me roll;
Blest Sav-ior, then, in love, Fear and dis-trust re-move;
O bear me safe a-bove, A ran-somed soul! A-men.

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, Easter lilies, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department, AMEC Publishing House, and others will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.