

“Sunday words” and a worship service for the Second Sunday of Easter, April 11, 2021.....

Good morning from a still slightly dark hill in Rockport.... But the birds have awakened!

“peace. it does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. it means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart.” author unknown.....

These words are on a card we keep sitting in our kitchen window which looks out to one of the suet feeders on our deck and the trees beyond. I need these words. Do you? The news continues to be not so peaceful, except for the increasing numbers of people receiving the covid vaccine. That IS good news! But the rest of the news leaves me so “unpeaceful” each day I have to turn off the news.... I imagine I’m not alone. We need some peace around here.... everywhere.... but it doesn’t seem to come. Yet.... Jesus repeats three times in our scripture reading from the Gospel of John this morning, “Peace be with you.” It is the mantra often said in worship services – “Peace be with you,” one person says to another..... And the other responds, “And also with you.” Sometimes those words feel no more meaningful or truly meant than the words tossed out too often, “Have a nice day!”

I need these words to be meaningful. Do you? “peace means to be in the midst of noise, trouble or hard work, and still be calm in your heart.” I’ll take a deep breath today and think of Jesus saying to me, “Peace be with you. I mean it!”

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Blessings to each one this Second Sunday of Easter morning.... Susan

p.s. I’ll copy below the worship bulletin from this morning’s service and following it, the text from John we’ll consider this morning, and my sermon. I will post the text and my sermon on my Facebook page, freerangepastor, and on the church’s Facebook page, the Federated Church of Thomaston later today....

p.s.s. This bulletin will be missing the announcements Frances has placed at the end of the bulletins we’ll have in church this morning.... technical challenges of this “operator, me” are the reason.....

p.s.s.s. Let Alice or me know if you have suggestions for hymn choices or other music for our worship services.... We’ll do our best to meet your needs and desires....

**Federated Church in Thomaston**  
**United Church of Christ    United Methodist Church**  
**All Are Welcome**

**Sunday, April 11, 2021 – Second Sunday of Easter**

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor    Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director

Lector: Jackie Harjula

*Please be respectfully silent once our worship service has begun.*

*An asterisk (\*) indicates where you are invited to stand.*

***Bold print indicates that the people speak these responses & prayers.***

## GATHERING FOR WORSHIP

### Welcome and Announcements

We will keep wearing masks for the foreseeable future in our services. I will take mine off so you all can hear me, but put it on when we are singing. You may know from the advisories that have been sent out by the CDC that singing in church is one of the three ways we are most likely to catch or spread the covid virus. The other two are going to restaurants and bars, and attending public events where there are lots of people.

We'll have our offering plates available in the back of the sanctuary if you choose to make a donation or give your pledge envelopes for today on your way out.

Let Alice or me know if you have hymn or other music selections you would like us to include in our Sunday services.

We'll leave the service today by rows, beginning up front.

Please don't gather in Leach Hall. Outside is the safest place to gather still. It will be a while yet before we can gather for coffee hour downstairs.

Any other announcements?

### Prelude

### Call to Worship

Leader: In the shadow of resurrection we live out our faith.

**People: In the touch of a hand, we proclaim Jesus risen.**

Leader: In the community around the empty tomb we will trust the promise of grace....

**All: and break out in the joy of resurrection! Let us worship God!**

**\*Opening Hymn** "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise" (see insert)

### An Invocation....

Be with us this morning, O God. Receive our prayers of longing. Hear our singing. Keep us safe in this still tentative time of gathering together in your sanctuary. We begin again in the name of the one and the many you have sent to show us the way to new life in you this day. Amen.

**A Prayer based on Acts 4:32-35** (said in unison)

**Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul,**

*May we strive to follow their lead....*

**With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.**

*May we give testimony to our belief in the resurrection of Jesus.*

**There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.**

*May we be generous in spirit and in body so that none would be in need.*

**They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.**

*May we give thanks for the bounty we have received and the call to share that bounty with one another.*

*Amen.*

**A Moment of Silence**

**SERVICE OF THE WORD**

**Special Music**

**Scripture Reading** John 20:19-31

**\*Gloria Patri**

**Message** “Reach out your hand...” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

**\*Hymn of Meditation** “Breathe on Me, Breath of God” (see insert)

**RESPONDING IN FAITH**

**Sharing Our Joys and Concerns with God and Each Other**

**Pastoral Prayer followed by The Lord’s Prayer.....**

**Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen.**

**Offertory** (Offering plates are placed in the back of the sanctuary. Thank you!)

**\*Doxology** No. 95 Blue

**\*Prayer of Dedication**

**\*Closing Hymn** “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today” (see insert)

**Benediction & Postlude**

**Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, April 18, 2021**

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter**

**Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48**

**PRAYER LIST**

**And** for Cynthia Rosti who had a knee replacement two days ago and for Richard, taking care of her!

**Hold** in your prayers all those affected by the coronavirus and the families of those who have died from the virus.... **And** all those families affected by the use of addictive drugs and alcohol among their members.... **And** all those dealing with the ravages of cancer near and far..... **And** add to our prayers,

from Blair a request for prayers her friend Judith on the passing of her daughter, Lani, 42, from brain cancer, from Jackie a request for prayers for Kyle Cloudier deep prayers for Hank and Lucy as Hank endures his cancer journey with the help of Hospice and a request from Mimi for Kendall, who is 49 and has hereditary neuropathy. It is progressing rapidly and at some point he will be in braces. Mike Sodano, who has had three-way bypass surgery this week, a friend of Mimi's and known to many in Thomaston, "Cody," who doesn't live locally but needs prayers for guidance; and Ed Lee, Enid, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, Harriet Williams, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Sally Harjula Elliot, Trish Perry, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, Doug and BJ Thomson, Heather Van Buskirk, and Michael and Gail in southern Maine  
***Please send me the names of those you would like for me to add to this list next Sunday..... AND those you would like for me to remove from this list.***

"That night that Christ came Thomas had not been present.  
We do not know why.  
But is there not here a warning for us  
not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together?"  
∴ Arthur John Gossip, *The Interpreter's Bible*, 1952

**"Reach out your hand..."**  
**A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston**  
**Thomaston, Maine**  
**Sunday, April 11, 2021**  
**Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**  
**Scripture: John 20:19-31**

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." 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 the Father 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 20:19-31

Will you pray with me. Ever beckoning God, creator of heaven and earth, you call us into belief even when we fight you tooth and nail and resist you with all our might. Open our ears, open our eyes, open our hands, open our hearts that we may find you, without a doubt, in our midst this day. Amen.

These things did Thomas count as real;  
The warmth of blood, the chill of steel,  
The grain of wood, the heft of stone,  
The last frail twitch of flesh and bone.

The vision of his skeptic mind  
Was keen enough to make him blind  
To any unexpected act too large for  
His small world of fact.

He reasons certainties denied  
That one could live when one had died,  
Until his fingers read like Braille,  
The marking of the spear and nail.

May we, O God, by grace believe  
And thus the risen Christ receive,  
Whose raw, imprinted palms reached out  
And beckoned Thomas from his doubt.

I wish I could say I wrote these poetic and descriptive words, but I didn't. They are the words to a hymn entitled “These Things Did Thomas Count” in the New Century Hymnal. They were written by theology professor Dr. Tom

Troeger, whom I've heard preach and lecture several times. Dr. Troeger's words, along with the words of our scripture reading this morning, point to the many themes and directions in which to go with our reflection about this "post-Resurrection" appearance of Jesus to his disciples.

We could talk about Jesus' words to the disciples, "Peace be with you." And what those words might mean in the context of the disciples' world and our world today.

We could talk about Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit onto the disciples and his instructions to them to forgive sins. What does it feel like to "receive the Holy Spirit" and to forgive sins? (John 20:22)

We could talk about whether we believe in these signs which gospel writer John says he includes in the story "so that you, [the reader], might come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you, [the reader], might have life in his name." (John 20:31)

These would all be worthy topics for us to choose from this morning. But I want to talk about something more concrete – something we can relate to right here and now. I want you to do something for me. Don't worry, it isn't going to hurt and you're not going to embarrass yourself.

I want you to look at your hands. Look at the backs of them. Look at the palms.

Notice where there are freckles, or heaven forbid, what we call "liver spots."

Notice any scars you might have on your hands.

Notice any fingers that are shorter than they should be because of some accident you've had along the way.

Notice the way you keep your nails.

Notice how rough or how smooth and soft your hands are.

Notice any callouses you have from hard physical labor or holding a pen too much or playing a musical instrument like a guitar, or ukulele or standing bass.

Think about whether your hands look like your mother's or father's hands, or your grandmother's or grandfather's if you were fortunate enough to have them in your life. I think my hands must look like my grandmother's on my mother's side, even though she died before I was born, because her rings used to fit me perfectly.

Now, I want you to look at your neighbor's hands. Don't worry, I'm not going to ask you to hold hands – I thought about that, but not with the covid

situation! Notice how much your neighbor's hands are like yours, or how much they are not like yours at all.

Our hands are important. They are one of the two parts of our bodies that are almost never covered up, except when we go outside and it's cold. The other part of our bodies that is almost never covered is our head. Our hands are visible and prove that we are alive – to ourselves and to those around us.

What better visual aids for Jesus to use with Thomas than his hands! Jesus' hands and Thomas' hands play a crucial role in our scripture reading for this morning. Jesus showed the disciples who were with him, when Thomas wasn't, his hands and his side. (John 20:20) Thomas said he would not believe Jesus had appeared unless he saw the mark of the nails in his hands and put his finger in the mark of the nails and his hand in Jesus' side. (John 20:25) Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side." (John 20:27)

Our hands are visible and the proof that we are alive. Jesus must have believed that and as he did so many times in his ministry, he relied on the everyday, the simple facts of life to get us to "Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

Do we believe it? Do we believe that Christ rose from death? If we call ourselves Christians, we're supposed to believe it. *Thomas* was a believer. He was a devoted follower of Jesus before his death. The Gospels tell us he was more devoted than a few others were. Yet, he needed proof – *proof that he could see* – that Jesus was back on the scene, after his death and resurrection.

I think one of the reasons I like the stories of Jesus' "post Resurrection" appearances is because they point out clearly how much we are like the first disciples.

We don't get it right all the time.

We deny Jesus sometimes by our words and actions, and we don't even know we've done it.

We say we believe and then wonder where God is when we think our prayers are not being answered.

We want some confirmation that our faith is true and that we're not coming here every Sunday morning.... finally again.... in vain.

And I will go so far as to say I bet there are a whole bunch of us who might want to hide behind Thomas and say, "Yes, *I* want to see those marks in his hands and his side, too. I believe, but I would sure like some *confirmation* of my belief." I won't ask how many of you might be in that line behind Thomas, but I

will admit that I would be. I'd love to have just a little more "proof" I could put my finger on, as it were. But I don't have more proof.

All I can do is fall back on my faith in the words of Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Jesus showed the disciples his hands and his side and they believed it was him. What are we shown so that WE believe it was him?

I was shown something one day when I was in seminary in the late 1990's that I've never forgotten. It happened while I was attending the weekly Wednesday chapel service offered on the seminary's campus. My showing involved "Shawn," a young seminary student who was in his early 20's at the time. Shawn had no arms – or rather he had these very short stubs at his shoulders. And at the end of each of these stubs was a hand, of sorts, with about three fingers, of sorts. Shawn was born like this. Now the first time I met Shawn it was a little disconcerting to look at him. But I got used to it because Shawn acted like his hands and arms were no different than mine!

On the Wednesday I particularly remember, Shawn participated in the chapel service by appearing as Jesus in a dramatization of the passage we're considering this morning. Thomas was portrayed by a big guy at the seminary who was about a head taller than Shawn and probably twice his weight. At the crucial point in the telling of the story, Shawn as Jesus, came up behind Thomas and put his little webbed hand up onto Thomas' shoulder. I remember there was not a sound in the chapel at that point.

If there was ever a visible sign of the presence of God in the midst of a church service, it was watching Shawn gently place his very small sort of hand on the shoulder of a very large regular looking guy and sayings softly, "Peace be with you."

As the saying goes, "seeing is believing," and Shawn brought that home to me then, and now. Jesus brought it home to Thomas by having him place his finger in his side and on his hand.

Here's two questions for you to think about today. Who brings Jesus home for you? And how do you bring Jesus home for others? Let the people say, "Amen."