

Sunday, April 19th, 2020
Second Sunday of Easter || Pastor Christy Wright

We invite you to light a candle at 9 AM and join us in prayer

Audio worship, including music, is available at <https://georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services>

Scripture Reading

John 20:19-29

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 had seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Sermon

By now, you know that Harry Potter is one of my favorite book series, and I've already been through two sets, they're so worn out. There's this amazing family in the book: the Weasley family. Though they don't have much in terms of finances, their generosity and love is more than enough. The mother of the family, Molly, has a very special gift: her love language is food. No matter what the circumstance, she sets the table. She sets it in hospitality, like when she welcomes Harry into the Weasley home for the first time. She sets the table in joy, celebrating the end of a beautiful summer and the beginning of a new school year. Her love abounds at the table, and the community it inspires is like none other.

But sometimes, she is also called to set the table in pain and uncertainty, like when her husband was critically wounded. In this particular moment, Harry is feeling the weight of guilt, for he is certain it's his fault that Mr. Weasley is suffering. It's Christmas, and the rest of the family is trying to move on by putting up decorations and spending time with one another. JK Rowling describes it with great warmth. And yet Harry "could hear [his godfather's singing] echoing up through the floor in the cold and empty drawing room where he was sitting alone, watching the sky outside the windows growing whiter. ... When he heard Mrs. Weasley calling his name softly up the stairs around lunchtime, he retreated farther upstairs and ignored her."¹

We stepped into the Easter season last week with a beautiful service with music from our new Music Director, Melissa, that witnessed to the risen Christ. We proclaimed locally and from afar that Jesus is not in the tomb, but is among us in power and spirit. We sang of the miracle of resurrection, and indeed, this resurrection has been and continues to be celebrated through the ages.

And yet...

What happens if we're not so sure? Not just about the resurrection, but about life in general? What if our current circumstances are coloring our faith? What happens when we doubt? When we can't see things clearly? When we desperately want to believe, but there's too much in our way?

In the midst of the Coronavirus outbreak, we have been living in a Holy Saturday within our world and community. This Holy Saturday has become a holding place before the Easter celebration, a liminal, temporary space of the unknown. We, too, have been gathering over the phone and through letters in quiet upper rooms to

¹ JK Rowling, "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix," 497-8, Scholastic, Inc., 2003.

discuss how we move forward, and we, too, have been locking our doors out of fear. We find ourselves in a tomb of uncertainty, for we do not know what the future of our world holds.

And yet...

When Jesus first appears to his followers, he says “Peace be with you.” In essence, he knows how they’ve been feeling. It’s a bubbling up of anxiety and fear, fear enough for them to lock their doors. And yet Jesus is somehow able to stand among them, holding out his hands that bear the wounds of condemnation. Again, Jesus implores, “Peace be with you,” and then sends them out, in words that could be interpreted as, “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

And yet...

Thomas wasn’t there. Why? Was he fearful and embarrassed about it? Was he mourning in private, without his community? Or was he social distancing, and because there were already ten disciples in the Upper Room, he knew we can’t have gatherings of more than ten people? On a more serious note though, what do we miss when we go off alone to process something that ought to be processed in community? What do we miss when we can’t be together, when we can’t hug one another or even simply visit?

Thomas didn’t hear Jesus’ words, and he didn’t see Jesus’ wounds. Thomas missed the opportunity to touch Jesus’ scarred and marred hands and side. Instead, Thomas waited, alone, for he wanted to witness the risen Christ, but couldn’t bring himself to believe until it was all revealed before him.

And yet...

God is a God of second chances – missed opportunities are never truly gone. Through God’s incredible grace, Jesus offered peace specifically to Thomas this time. He offered Thomas peace before he allowed Thomas to prod his wounds, probably still sore from the violence that had been inflicted. And Jesus’ wisdom spilled forth: “Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe.”

And yet...

The time is still uncertain. Jesus tells us that he will not stay, at least physically. And a dynamic shift in ministry will occur. It isn’t business as usual. One of my favorite authors, Diana Butler Bass, observed that Jesus’ appearances after his resurrection most often occurred around a meal or makeshift table. And she asks a very simple, very profound question: “Can God set a table in the wilderness?”²

And my response is, yes! From the Last Supper to the fish fry on the beach, from breaking bread with the two followers on the Road to Emmaus to breaking down the door of the Upper Room, it is clear that God has set, and continues to set tables in the wilderness, tables that are overflowing with grace, even if the meal is simple bread and wine.

Harry Potter spent that day alone, sitting with his doubt, fear, guilt, and uncertainty in the darkest, coldest room upstairs, isolated from the ones he loved most. But by dinner that evening, his closest friends knocked on his door and sought him out. Mrs. Weasley had sent sandwiches up to Harry’s room, and Harry and his friends sat together to talk about what had happened. At first, Harry didn’t want to hear it. But once they assured Harry that he didn’t do anything wrong, “Harry started pacing up and down the room again, thinking. What they were all saying was not only comforting, it made sense... Without really thinking, he took a sandwich from the plate on the bed and crammed it hungrily into his mouth. ... His heart swelled with happiness and relief, and he felt like joining in as they heard [Harry’s godfather] tramping past their door ... singing [Christmas carols] at the top of his voice.”³

Just as Harry’s friends sought him out, so too may we seek out those who are experiencing fear and doubt by sharing phone calls. Just as Harry’s friends shared the good news, so too may we share the good news of the risen Christ through sending cards. Just as Harry’s friends brought the table to Harry in a time of uncertainty, so

² Diana Butler Bass, “Doubting Thomas’ Story is About Gratitude, Not Doubt,” 11 April 2018, <https://religionnews.com/2018/04/11/doubting-thomas-story-is-about-gratitude-not-doubt>

³ Rowling, 500-1.

too may bring the picnic, the meal, the sandwiches into the wilderness and invite all to be nourished through our prayers and love.

Now, set before us, is another table made of the uprooted trees of our world. Things will not exist as they have before. And it will not be business as usual. Though this is a time of great uncertainty, we know that grace and love spills forth from this table, inviting all to partake in its riches. And, as we await resurrection amid our wounds, may we believe, though we cannot see the way forward. May we unlock the doors of our hearts, ushering others to join us in sacred community through our letters, phone calls, and emails that we may all process our grief together. May we all encounter the living Christ in the meals we share, particularly with those who are feeling lonely and isolated. And may we have a reason to sit at the wilderness table, stare uncertainty in the face, and say, with hopeful resolution, "and yet..." Amen.

Hymn: Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service UMH 581

*1. Lord, whose love through humble service
Bore the weight of human need,
Who upon the cross, forsaken,
Offered mercy's perfect deed:
We your servants, bring the worship
Not of voice alone, but heart,
Consecrating to your purpose
Every gift that you impart.*

*2. Still your children wander homeless;
Still the hungry cry for bread;
Still the captives long for freedom;
Still in grief we mourn our dead.
As, O Lord, your deep compassion
Healed the sick and freed the soul,
Use the love your Spirit kindles
Still to save and make us whole.*

*3. As we worship, grant us vision,
Till your love's revealing light
In its height and depth and greatness
Dawns upon our quickened sight,
Making known the needs and comfort,
Burdens your compassion bids us bear,
Stirring us to tireless striving
Your abundant life to share.*

*4. Called by worship to your service,
Forth in your dear name we go
To the child, the youth, the aged,
Love in living deeds to show;
Hope and health, good will and comfort,
Counsel aid, and peace we give,
That your servants, Lord in your freedom
May your mercy know, and live*

In Our Prayers. Thanksgiving for: God's hand in medical advancements, doctors, nurses, medical professionals, nursing home caregivers, police, firefighters, EMTs, and all essential workers who still must report to work and cannot stay home. Holding in our hearts: all those affected by the Coronavirus and the health of our world, all those who have lost income due to the virus, Barry, the family of Bernice, Betty, Dell, Evelyn, the family of Judy Bartlett in her loss, Melissa for her shoulder injury recovery, our prayer shawl recipients, Phyllis who is recovering from pneumonia at Quabbin Valley Healthcare, Priscilla, Rachel who is a nurse at Tufts, the Reim family, the United Methodist Church, all those who struggle with addiction, all those who are in the path of dangerous weather. Note that this list will renew each month.

And now, may the peace of the Lord Christ go with you wherever God may send you; may God guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm; may God bring you home rejoicing at the wonders God has shown you; may God bring you home rejoicing once again into our doors.⁴

⁴ Book of Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals

Community Announcements

- **Welcome Melissa!** We are so excited to welcome Melissa Quilitzsch to our staff as the Music Director. You can hear her playing at <https://georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services>, and she will continue to be playing for future services. If you are unable to access the internet, let Pastor Christy know, and she can mail you a CD of our services.
- **Recipe Collection.** In classic Methodist fashion, we all know that food brings us together. Pastor Christy is putting together a cookbook of our church's favorite recipes to share with everyone during this time of being apart. Please email, snail mail, or call Christy to tell her your favorite recipe(s) by Friday, May 1st. Feel free to share a story and/or photos surrounding the recipe too!
- **Prayer Chain.** If you are interested in staying in touch with folks and being a part of our Prayer Chain, let Pastor Christy know. If you have a request you'd like to send through, call Christy or Jane to initiate the chain.
- **Church Directory.** If you would like an updated Church Directory, please let Pastor Christy know, and she will send one in the next mailing.
- **Thank you!!** to Paul Ayers for his many years of service to our church as our treasurer! He has done incredible work for our church. Paul will be stepping back from his responsibilities in June, and we are now looking for a new treasurer. Let us be in prayer and discernment as we seek a new treasurer, and please contact Pastor Christy by April 22nd if you are interested in serving. A Finance Committee Meeting will take place in the second half of April to discuss responsibilities and a transition plan.
- **Offerings** are still being encouraged during this time. Please consider mailing your offering to our church PO Box, so that we are able to continue in ministry through Christ for the transformation of the world. Offerings can be mailed to: George Whitefield United Methodist Church, PO Box 576, West Brookfield, MA 01585
- **Heifer Project - Please Send in Your Gifts.** Our Mission Project for Lent is supporting Heifer Project International, an organization that raises funds for economic development for folks in need across the world through environmental sustainability and other methods. Checks can be made out to George Whitefield UMC with the memo line "Heifer Project." See Pastor Christy if you have any questions. Thank you for supporting this mission effort during Lent! *Please send your final checks to the church, and we will decide on which animal we'd like to purchase.*
- **The Sharing Cupboard** is experiencing high volumes of need at this time. If you are able to donate jelly, jam, coffee, canned protein products such as tuna, chicken, and beans, or household products such as hand sanitizer, disinfecting cleaning wipes or spray, bar soap, toilet paper, paper towels, or laundry detergent, it would be greatly appreciated.
- **Future Services.** We are disappointed to say that all church services will continue to be suspended until further notice at Gov. Baker's orders, which means we will not be able to meet together for Easter. For the latest updates on our response to COVID-19, be sure to check out our website at georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com or Like us on Facebook. You can also call the church number at (508) 867-3667 for more information.

A Companion Guide ***The Upper Room Daily Devotionals***

Monday, April 20th through Saturday, April 25th

Written by Pastor Christy Wright

We invite you to light a candle at 9 AM daily and join us in prayer and devotion. If you do not have a copy of The Upper Room Daily Devotionals, let Pastor Christy know & she will send you one.

Monday, April 20th, 2020

Read Psalm 23:1-6

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil.”

Have you ever needed to get up in the middle of the night, and not wanting to turn on the light, you feel your way around the room? For most of us, we know our bedrooms like the back of our hands, knowing that we ought to give the nightstand a wide berth so we don't stub our toe, or making sure to avoid stepping on the cat. God's love for us provides light, even in the darkness, and as we become more familiar with God's word, we know that we don't have to fear the darkness, but instead can live our lives with confidence, knowing that God will be by our side from now until the end of the age.

Let Us Pray Together

God of Light, You direct us and guide us, even in the darkest of times. You walk with us even when we can't see. Be with us, we pray, as we navigate through our world. Be present to our fears and doubts, giving us faith in the midst of the unknown, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday, April 21st, 2020

Read Luke 22:39-43

“Then he withdrew from them..., knelt down, and prayed.”

During this time of social distancing, I have begun to value alone time much more than I have in the past. I used to hang out with friends several nights a week and visit my family in Connecticut once or twice a month. There would seldom be a week without plans or gatherings. But these days, I'm finding more time for devotion and prayer, and being still in meditation has been so nourishing. Even Jesus needed to withdraw from time to time. In our time of forced isolation, may we rest in Jesus' presence, knowing that we are never withdrawn from the Divine's presence.

Let Us Pray Together

God of ever present Love, You are our constant companion in the midst of social isolation. You are with us, even as we withdraw from the world. Your love surpasses all boundaries. Be our comfort and peace, as we meet in devotion with You, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Wednesday, April 22nd, 2020

Read Numbers 11:21-30

“Is the Lord's power limited?”

When I was first appointed to this church, I was very fearful and anxious. How would I be received? Would I know what to do? But more than that, I was afraid I would mess things up. I was afraid of the mistakes I would make, and I was afraid of unintentionally harming the church. And surely, I have made mistakes, and I know I still have a lot to learn. But one thing has been made clear: it's in God's hands, not mine. When we get out of God's way, and let the Spirit move among us, amazing things happen, and we begin to recognize that God's power is far from limited. It is all-encompassing, as is God's love. Take hope in knowing that God's got us.

Let Us Pray Together

God our Divine Caregiver, You hold the power to heal and the power to change the world. You empower us to be Jesus' hands and feet in the world that so desperately needs Your love and care. Inspire us today, to do good deeds in Your name, so that we might remember who truly holds the power, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thursday, April 23rd, 2020**Read 2 Kings 5:1-15****“Go, wash in the Jordan River.”**

Whenever I was upset as a child, my parents would get me a glass of cold water and tell me to take a time out for a few minutes to cool down. And it always worked: it made me calm, allowed me to gather myself, and I felt restored, like I had never been distressed. We read today in 2 Kings that, by taking a swim in the Jordan River, Naaman was cured of leprosy. Though Naaman was expecting a different miracle, one of hand-waving and instant relief, sometimes it is the simplest of paths that we are called to take. Go, Naaman was told, wash in the Jordan River. And as he did, his skin was restored and he was found healthy and well. How are you finding relief in the simple things? How is God empowering you to take care of yourself?

Let Us Pray Together

God our Provider, You give us the gifts of water to drink and air to breathe. You provide simple and beautiful provisions for us everyday. Teach us to drink and breathe deeply, as we learn to take care of ourselves even when we are distressed and tired. You are the one who relieves our pain and fear, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Friday, April 24th, 2020**Read 2 Corinthians 4:11-5:4****“So we do not lose heart.”**

This passage is so beautiful, it can stand alone. Let us meditate on it together. 2 Corinthians 4:11-5:4 reads, “For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture - ‘I believed, and so I spoke’ - we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed in our heavenly dwelling - if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident ... for we walk by faith, not by sight.”

Let Us Pray Together

God of eternity, You see the things we cannot, and You remind us that our current affliction is temporary. Your great love is evidence that we will be together once again. Be with us, we pray, and even when all else feels like it is wasting away, encourage us to take heart, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Saturday, April 25th, 2020**Read Psalm 119:105-112****“I hold my life in your hand continually.”**

Having a dog has made me aware of how much care a dog really needs! If I’m in the middle of a work project, and he needs to go out, *he needs to go out*. If I am making dinner, and he’s constantly under my feet trying to catch any food scraps that might fall on the floor, *he expects his dinner before I sit down to eat mine*. In many ways, his life is held in my hands; his direct care is my responsibility. In this passage from Psalm, we are reminded just how much we depend on God, and how freely God cares for us, not as a burden, but out of love. May we recognize the many ways God’s love and our devotion builds relationships through prayer and worship.

Let Us Pray Together

God of love, You hold us in Your hands in care and gentleness. Your guiding hand is a lamp until our feet. Be present with us as we build trust with You and find all we need in Your great love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.