

## Order of Worship for 4-11-21 8:30 & 11 AM

**Livestream Link:** <https://youtu.be/EyGs2DbxAUQ>

### **Prelude:**

P: Alleluia, Jesus Christ is risen!

C: **He is risen indeed, Alleluia!**

**Opening Hymn:** “*With High Delight Let Us Unite*” - **Hymn #483**

### **Confession and Absolution**

P: In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

### **Lesson: 1 John 1:1-2:2**

R: That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

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**Hymn of Praise:** “*O Sons and Daughters of the King*” - **Hymn #470** vs. 1-7

### **Holy Gospel: John 20:19-31**

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the twentieth chapter.

C: **Glory to You, O Lord.**

P: On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the

disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you." And 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 withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, 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 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." Eight days later, His disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, 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; and put out your hand, and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve, 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 believed." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**C: Praise to You, O Christ.**

**Hymn of Praise:** "*O Sons and Daughters of the King*" - **Hymn #470**, vs. 8-9

### **Entrance Psalm**

P: Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk,  
that by it you may grow up into salvation—

**C: if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.**

P: Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon His name;

**C: make known His deeds among the peoples!**

P: Sing to Him, sing praises to Him;

**C: tell of all His wondrous works!**

P: Glory in His holy name;

**C: let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice!**

P: Seek the Lord and His strength;

**C: seek His presence continually!**

P: Remember the wondrous works that He has done,

**C: His miracles, and the judgments He uttered,**

P: He remembers His covenant forever,

**C: the word that He commanded, for a thousand generations.**

**ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

P: Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk,  
that by it you may grow up into salvation—

**C: if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.**

**Prayer of the Day:**

P: Almighty God, grant that we who have celebrated the Lord's resurrection may by Your grace confess in our life and conversation that Jesus is Lord and God; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

**Reading: Acts 4:32-35**

R: Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**Sermon Hymn: "These Things Did Thomas Count as Real" - Hymn #472****Sermon: "Overcoming Doubt" - John 20:19-31**

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! It's the week after Easter, and that's always a bit of a letdown. Easter is one of the biggest Sundays of the year for most churches, and so anything would be a letdown. But after not being able to gather together at all last year, people are looking for connection, craving community, wanting to be with others.

The time around Easter is also when news stories about religion pick up for a bit. There are the usual stories about how different groups are trying to prove or disprove the resurrection. This year included stories of churches hosting vaccine distribution sites, finding creative ways to come together with the pandemic restrictions, or churches who ignored the restrictions altogether. The biggest story this year was a Gallup poll that showed that church membership in the United States fell below fifty percent for the first time. With 70% of people saying they were a member of a church, synagogue, or mosque in 2000, that's a 20 percent drop in twenty years. About half of the drop can be attributed to changes in religious preferences, the other half can be attributed to people still believing, but not formally joining a church. Even around here, there are people who attend frequently but may not be officially members due to paperwork problems.

The drop in formal membership in groups of any kind has been happening for decades, too. It's been a couple of decades since sociologist Robert Putnam published *Bowling Alone*, about the disruption of community groups, how people aren't joining groups or organizations anymore. That trend doesn't seem to be ending anytime soon. Add in the ways that the institutional church has dealt with sexual abuse or financial scandals, plus political polarization being reflected in churches and it's no surprise church membership is declining.

Our Gospel lesson is famous for being the story of “doubting Thomas,” but the main reason we remember Thomas and his doubts is because he's not with the group that first Easter evening. We forget the rest of the disciples aren't much better. They were hiding in the locked room, trying to make sense of what the women had told them about the empty tomb, and what Peter and John had seen when they went there, until Jesus shows up. They didn't seem to truly believe Jesus had risen from the dead until they had seen Him in the flesh.

Thomas, though, doesn't get to see that first appearance. So when he was told of Jesus' appearance to the other disciples, Thomas answered defiantly, “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”.

There's debate over why he wasn't with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them. Some think that it was because Thomas was no longer “with” the disciples, no longer a part of the group, no longer a follower of Jesus. He was off on his own, alone, dealing with the grief and fear he had by himself. And being alone like that was dangerous.

The health effects of loneliness are well known, and have been raised as one of the main costs of many of the pandemic restrictions used this last year. Even before the pandemic, we knew that loneliness, or social isolation, has a huge impact. It raises the risk of premature death by up to 50%, ranking near smoking and alcohol use. It increases risks of dementia and mobility loss.

Being alone has a spiritual cost, too. The devil is described as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. And if you've ever watched a nature documentary, you know that predators like to pick off those who are alone, those who are away from the herd, those who are not protected by the group. The same thing happens spiritually.

That's part of the danger that comes from the drop in church membership and church attendance. People who are alone are easily led astray. They can look for any other group to join, whether it's a good group or not. They can put their faith too much in a politician or government or science or conspiracy theories.

Thomas was alone that first Easter, and so he missed out on Jesus, and he doubted. But that wasn't the end of the story. Whatever his reason was for not being with the other disciples that first evening, Thomas is with the other disciples the next week. And that's important. Even though he doubts, he is willing to give his friends the benefit of the doubt and show up and see what happens.

Eight days later, they are still in the same locked room, waiting for Jesus to come to them. Jesus had overcome sin and death, but the same powers that be that sentenced him to death were still the powers that be that threatened the disciples. And so they hid behind locked doors, still afraid. This time Thomas is with them, waiting to see what will happen, waiting to see if he can believe again.

Jesus didn't leave Thomas in his doubts. The risen Jesus appeared to the disciples again and said to them, “Peace be with you,” calming their fears. More than that, then Jesus turned to Thomas with outstretched arms and said, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but *believe*.”

Martin Luther believes this is the lesson of the Thomas episode. “We may learn how Christ loves us, and how amiably, fatherly, gently, and mildly he deals with us and would deal with us.... He does not desire to overturn or reject the weak in faith, but bears patiently with their weakness, not snarling at them frightfully, but handling them gently and respectfully.”

Thomas sees the risen Jesus for himself. But it's not just the seeing that lets him believe. It's the words of Jesus that let him believe. It's the years he spent following Jesus. It's the testimony of the other disciples and the women who prepared him for this moment. And it is being with the other disciples, other believers, that helps him believe again.

G.K. Chesterton once wrote “The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.” An open mind does no good if it only stays open, moved from one thing to another. The point of opening your mind is to find a firm foundation. The point of an open mind is to shut it on something solid.

We all have trouble believing sometimes. We all have friends or family or neighbors who have trouble believing. We can't argue them into believing – we can only help clear away the obstacles that are keeping them from believing. We can't scold them into believing – we can only encourage them to continue to search for knowledge, and pray for them. We shouldn't leave them alone in their doubts, but should walk alongside them and guide them on their journey of discovery.

Sin conspires to keep us separate, keep us lonely, and keep us isolated. But Jesus defeated sin, and his work brings us together. He brought his disciples back together after they'd scattered during Holy Week. The Holy Spirit continues to bring us together to encourage one another, support one another, help one another overcome doubts. Being with others helped Thomas overcome his doubts. It can help you, too.

**Prayer of the Church:** (Based on John 20:19-31)

P: “Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, 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 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.’”

**C: Lord Jesus, we would like proof. We want to be in charge of things and to have things we can understand and control. Like Thomas we can be stubborn.**

P: “Eight days later, Jesus disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’”

**C: You appeared to the disciples and showed them You truly rose from the dead. You have triumphed over sin and death!**

P: “Then 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.’”

**C: We are thankful that You gave clear evidence to Thomas, but what about us? Why can't You prove now to us and all others that You truly are the Son of God?**

P: “Jesus said to Thomas, ‘Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”

**C: You are talking about us. No, we have not seen You as Thomas and the disciples did, but we can see You in a clearer way through Your Word, through our Baptisms, through Holy Communion, through fellowship with other Christians, and as You forgive us of our sins as You did at the beginning of this service. Your words do not mean: “Blessed are you despite not seeing.” but they mean, “Blessed are those who have not seen,” those who rely not on evidence we can control, but on faith in You and Your promises.**

P: “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

**C: Give us the desire to get into Your Word which assures us that You are indeed risen!**

P: (other concerns)

Send Your Holy Spirit into our lives so that we daily can join Thomas in saying,

**C: “My Lord and my God!” Amen.**

### **Call to Holy Communion:**

P: Our Lord Jesus Christ showed Himself to His disciples risen from the dead. He came a week late to do that for Thomas. He now comes to us in His holy Supper so we can receive His true body and blood risen from the dead. We gather at His table in answer to His call to take and eat, and to drink. We join in His meal trusting that by it our sins are forgiven.

### **The Lord’s Prayer:**

#### **The Words of Our Lord:**

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

**C: Amen.**

### **Distribution of Holy Communion**

**Hymns:**     *“We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight” - Hymn #720*

*“Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain” - Hymn #487*

### **Dismissal:**

### **Closing Prayer:**

P: Almighty God, we have celebrated with joy the festival of our Lord’s resurrection. Graciously help us to show the power of the resurrection in all that we say and do; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

### **Blessing:**

(Pastor)

**C: Amen**

**Closing Hymn:** *“He Is Arisen, Glorious Word” - Hymn #488*