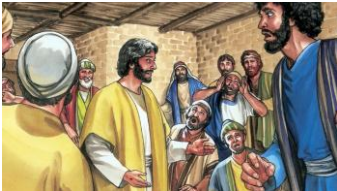


Gospel lesson

On the day of the resurrection, it took a little while for the disciples to realize the truth of what had happened...



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/qnpi-104-appearance-thomas/>;
credit: Good News Productions International and College Press Publishing

<stop sharing screen in Zoom>

John 20:19-31 NRSV

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

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

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

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

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

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."

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."

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."

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

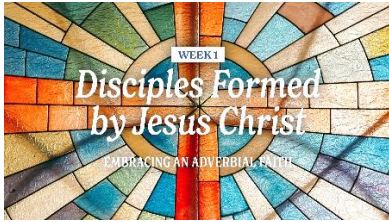
²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

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

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.

The Word of God for the people of God

<Interactive time>



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/miracle-sunday-worship-study-resources#worship-series>

The UMC Bishops wrote a six-week series entitled “Embracing an Adverbial Faith” and asked that we use it during the Easter season. This is Week 1 – “Disciples Formed by Jesus Christ.”

Jesus spent a lot of time teaching His disciples and told them multiple times what would happen before He died. After He rose from the dead, which disciples believed first? <Let them respond>

Did Thomas believe when first told about it? What did it take for him to believe? <Let them respond>

What did it take for the other disciples to believe that Jesus is alive? (Did they believe when Mary first told them?) <Let them respond>

The mission of the UMC is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world (UMC *Discipline* ¶120). What does it take for people to believe today? <Let them respond>

Why is it different for us than for the disciples immediately after Jesus rose from the dead?
<Let them respond>

How does the Holy Spirit form us as disciples today?
<Let them respond; pray with kids and let them go>

The UMC is rapidly expanding overseas in Africa, the

Philippines, and parts of Europe. To support this, we need to train people to spread the Word well, true to the message Jesus taught and the apostles proclaimed. On May 17, the UMC will take a special collection to fund that theological education.

About a year ago, in May 2025, the bishops of the United Methodist Church released a vision statement designed to help the church live into its mission: “The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections.”

- ✝ We are not just called to love, but to love boldly.
- ✝ We don't just hear a call to serve, but to serve joyfully.
- ✝ And we aren't seeking those who will just lead, but those who will lead courageously.

Over the next five weeks, we will be walking through what our bishops envision. Our start today involves receiving Christ's call to leave behind what holds us back and instead be formed as His disciples through the power of the Holy Spirit, living to transform the world with God's grace.

<resume sharing screen in Zoom>

<Hymn “We Walk By Faith”

TFWS #2196 vv.1-3>

Message: Unless I See



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/stories-that-matter/week-1-second-sunday-of-easter-year-a>

Please pray with me?

God of grace who frees us from fear to live in love, as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That as we trust more fully in You, we let You form us into disciples who love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously – in our community and everywhere we go. Amen.

<stop sharing screen in Zoom>

The sermon series theme for this Easter Season is "Stories That Matter."

We begin today with "Unless I See:"

"Thomas reminds us that the power of Resurrection is inseparable from its reality."

When it is real to us, we respond differently.

As physical creatures, we need to experience it with more than just our mind – we need to recognize God's presence with all of our senses and in all aspects of our lives. The more profoundly something affects us, the more passionately we tell others about it.

When a child learns something they like, they love to show it off (wherever they feel safe). I think that largely carries over into adulthood too, though we tend to be more cautious about sharing as we get burned by experience.

On Easter, Mary ran to tell the disciples that she had seen Jesus, sharing her great joy. Yet, as we talked about earlier, the other disciples did not seem to take her word for it. “When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week... the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews.”

Feeling fear is not sinful; proverbially (1:7, 9:10), “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” However, living in fear of people instead of in the love of God results in sin because it is based in idolatry. The psalmist talks about how “Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows” but with our Lord “there is fullness of joy.”

Throughout Jesus’s ministry, he was forming the disciples into people who could live fully in the love of God rather than being trapped in sin. Yet, even at His death, they did not understand what the power of God’s love meant, nor what the Creator of life was doing.

With only partial knowledge, they remained trapped in fear born of sin. Jesus had brought back people from the dead, but after He died, who was left with the power to bring Him back from the dead?

And if the temple leaders were able to eliminate the miracle-working rabbi, the Messiah, the Son of God, how much more readily could they eliminate His non-miraculous followers? The disciples did not dare speak out against the unfair execution of Jesus lest they receive the same fate! So, they locked the door.

What a perfect representation of being trapped by sin. Locking themselves in did not really protect them from harm; they had no way out should enemies surround them or even should a fire start accidentally. It did allow them to account for each person present, but it also prevented them from interacting with others - and for all we know, may even have been the reason Thomas was not in the room when Jesus arrived, if he had been locked out.

I wonder how often we do things we think are good, yet actually prevent us from experiencing blessings God would have us receive through other means.

But after they received the Holy Spirit, the everlasting power of the resurrection became more real to the disciples. Instead of hiding in locked rooms, they had courage to step outside and proclaim God's love to everyone.

Peter in particular, with the exuberance and confidence of a young child who had learned something wonderful, "raised his voice and addressed" the crowds. He told them about Jesus's resurrection and that very day three thousand people were baptized in Jesus's name!

And we are invited to be part of building God's kingdom too: to know the reality of the resurrection; to accept the inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading; and to live it in every aspect of our lives. We know that if we open our hearts to Jesus, we will be filled with God's love.

1 Peter talks about how "although you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy" - it is "the outcome of your faith."

Are you still welcoming Christ into your heart with the openness of a loving child? Or have you gotten sidetracked with mundane world worries?

This week, consider how you isolate yourself. It may not involve the literal locking of doors, but an unwillingness to listen or avoidance of encounters.

- ✝ Pray to God about it; meditate on scriptures about it; in some way, ask God into the situation.
- ✝ Let God teach you to trust, to show you what you need to see.
- ✝ Look for the Holy Spirit at work in the world, helping people through you or through others.
- ✝ Notice God's handiwork in the singing of the birds, the warm sunshine that penetrates beyond our skin to our souls, the smells of springtime as it blooms around us.

"Unless I See" - how can I see if I do not look? Do

not just listen to doomsayers on social media – look at the possibilities God is offering us in healthy relationships with those around us! Let Jesus bring you peace, form you into disciples who can live in love even in this world full of sin. Then, having experienced God’s power and love, go out and share it with others. Live fully as Easter people – disciples formed by Jesus Christ to live with love.

The world needs us to live as disciples of Jesus. Others are saying, “Unless I See” – unless they see fruit of the Spirit coming out of Christian lives, how can they know the reality of the risen Christ? How can anyone be formed into a disciple of Jesus if the reality of God’s love does not seep into and throughout their life?

Through discipleship, let the love of Jesus free us all from the trap of sin to live fully in communion with God and holy community with one another.

<Prayer posted by our Bishop Héctor A Burgos-Núñez on Facebook:¹>

Holy God, invite us into a trust that is deeper than our circumstances.

When life feels unsteady, draw our hearts back to Your goodness.

When our emotions swirl or our bodies carry the weight of stress, breathe Your calm into our minds and steady our spirits.

Remind us that Your love and mercy never leave us—not in confusion, not in difficulty, not in the moments we feel least grounded.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=939628235644306&set=a.112373455036459>

You are our provider, our sustainer, the One who
meets every need.

As we turn to You now, open us to Your peace and
anchor us again in Your faithful care. Amen. 🙏