



### WEEKLY STUDY April 30-May 6, 2023

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

#### **Easter**

On Easter Sunday we joined our voices with Christians world-wide proclaiming, "Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed! Hallelujah!" But Easter is more than one Sunday. Easter is a season in the Christian Year – continuing until May 28, Pentecost Sunday – where the scripture centers on the appearances of Jesus after resurrection. This Sunday is the Fourth Sunday of the Easter season.

#### **Our scripture is: John 20:24-29**

"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.'"

- 1) In this season of Easter, it's important to keep reading the stories of Jesus' appearing to the disciples. It reminds us that Easter isn't a "one and done" Sunday. The stories of Jesus' appearing to the disciples are rich with meaning and importance. This week our scripture selection tells us of Thomas's reaction to Jesus' appearance. No doubt, for many of us this is not the first time we've pondered this scripture. It's one that many remember. Reread the scripture to remind yourself once more of the story.

**Question: Prior to hearing Dr. Brian Sigmon's sermon on Sunday, what were your thoughts about Thomas and his relationship with Jesus? How did your understanding of Thomas change after hearing Sunday's sermon?**

- 2) Brian began his sermon by telling us the sermon would be about trust and belief. He explained that these two concepts are linked in scripture, so the theme of the sermon

would be, "What can we trust." And he had the congregation turn to one another saying, "Neighbor, O Neighbor what can we trust?"

**Question: Turn now to one another in your group asking that same question. Or if you are following this guide by yourself stop and ask yourself, "What do I trust?" What did you name? Why?**

- 3) One common belief that we may have thought ourselves, and often has been the subject of sermons, is the belief that Jesus was chastising Thomas. But Brian asked us to put aside this belief. He gave us an account of Thomas's life through the scripture that showed Thomas was "all in" as a disciple. He said, "When Jesus dies, Thomas's world collapses." And he reminds us that every account in the book of John of the disciples believing in Jesus' resurrection occurs when they see the risen Christ. So Thomas was doing nothing more than what all of those present for Jesus life, death and resurrection had done: believing after seeing. And this body of stories becomes for those who followed, the witness of trusted individuals who believed after seeing.

**Question: Had you considered before that our witness stories after the resurrection all include seeing Jesus? Recall those stories. Call out the names of those who saw and believed.**

- 4) In today's scripture, we read these words of Jesus, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Considering when gospel of John was likely written (between 90 and 100 CE), many who were hearing this gospel would not have been alive or lived in a place where they could have physically seen Jesus. In hearing these stories, they believed. Brian reminded us that we are part of this throng of witnesses. We too are the ones who believe without seeing. Brian then helped us think through what we trust. He did so with a reminder that social media isn't very trustworthy. He said instead, we trust ourselves and we trust each other. We trust friends. We trust congregations where we see through their actions witness to the living Christ. He ended with this admonition: "Trust yourself. Trust that the resurrection is for you."

**Question: When it comes to faith in God, who are those you trust, leading you to say, "Yes Lord, I believe"?**

**Prayer:** (*"Intercessions for the Weeks of the Easter Season: Week 4"*) **The UM Book of Worship**  
"O God, our shepherd, our gate, our lamb;  
In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your pasture.  
Guide us to your clear streams, and tame the wolf at our gate;  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia."

**Weekly Challenge: In the Christian Church, we celebrate the season of Easter until Pentecost Sunday. This year, make Easter more than a day. Start each day by saying "Christ is Risen. Christ is risen indeed" to yourself or to others. Daily consider who and what you trust and give thanks for the ways they aid you in your belief in God.**

*(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)*