

APRIL 24, 2022 SERMON

If ever we were in a moment of doubt, of wanting to see some evidences that God is near, or that a better day may come . . . now might be the time.

We may feel a bit less like Thomas and a bit more like the father in another Bible story who cried out to Jesus, “I believe! Help my unbelief!” Because we have some very good questions for God just now as we find ourselves caught up in this never-ending pandemic and a troubling European war.

All we can do with spiritual integrity is to direct God’s people to his Word, to what John wrote, to the witness he bore long ago and to the witness that John bears this day still.

I find it curious that in both of the Sunday encounters we read in this passage of John 20, both times the disciples are hiding out in a locked room.

On the first week we are told they locked the doors out of fear. The outer world did not transform in an instant just because Jesus had been raised from the dead. There were still things to fear.

The Jesus who told the disciples six chapters earlier “Let not your hearts be troubled” encounters still-troubled hearts in today’s Gospel lesson.

Easter’s reality or not.

We are troubled too.

We are locked up in our houses out of fear of a virus we cannot see but that stalks us.

We are inundated with distressing news of an ugly war that makes us feel helpless and very sad.

So maybe there is Good News in this story that Jesus does pop into locked rooms of fear.

That he presents evidence—somehow, some way—of the Life he has to give. That he gives us a servant like John to tell us the story that we may believe.

One of the most difficult disciplines that film actors need to learn is to resist the temptation to look directly at the camera.

Actors need to pretend like the camera is not there because if for a second they glance into the lens, viewers see it immediately. It’s hard to resist! But it’s a problem because when it happens, it breaks the magic spell that films try to cast.

When we read Matthew, Mark, and Luke, then we know that these three evangelists also avoid, as it were, “looking into the camera lens.”

They tell the story of Jesus straight out but without addressing their reading audiences directly.

John, however, is different.

Throughout his gospel John keeps stepping out of the scene to talk to us directly as readers. As we read various stories, it’s almost as though John stops the narrative now and again to whisper in our ear, “Now, remember, when Jesus first said this to us, we didn’t get it. It was only years later that we figured it out. OK, now back to our story!”

But nowhere is this as clearly evident as at the end of John 20 when we, the readers, take center stage as John turns directly toward us. He even uses the second person pronoun: “This is written so that you may believe.”

You can almost see John’s finger pointed in our direction.

But then . . . what John is writing is no piece of fiction, no novel, play or short story. It is the truth. And it is a truth that comes straight at every one of us! Amen