



## May 2022 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Beloved of God -

We meet the disciples huddled together. The doors are shut and locked. They can hardly breathe in that airless tomb. Their hearts are racing. Their minds spinning.

It was evening on that first day, the first day of the week. They had heard from Mary Magdalene that she had seen Jesus alive, that he had called her by name and turned her toward the new dawn of the empty tomb.

It was the death of Jesus that brought them together that evening, but it was not simply the death of Jesus that drew the disciples together – it was his resurrection. It was Mary Magdalene's witness: "I have seen the Lord."

And the doors were shut and locked. They could hardly breathe. They were afraid of everything on the other side of those doors: afraid of the forces that killed Jesus. Afraid, perhaps, of living. They were winded by fear. What now? Yes, what now?

It isn't hard for us, to imagine ourselves in that room. No, not after two plus years of pandemic. And not when we know for ourselves, and for others, of war and trauma and anxiety and fear and constant change and uncertainty and grief and losses of many kinds. And we are ourselves hardly breathing in our airless tombs. Our hearts racing. Our minds spinning.

All of which points me in the direction of the disciple, Thomas.

I know that we tend to think of Thomas in terms of his doubting, but what if that doubt were part of a larger insistence on dealing with reality, on getting things back to normal, on moving forward now that the worst has happened?

Why isn't Thomas in the house when Jesus makes his first appearance? I wonder if unlike the other disciples, who are behind shut and locked doors, Thomas has already accepted what has happened, has moved on, and is now out and about rebuilding his life from the fractured pieces that were left to him after the horrific events of Good Friday – or at least was attempting to, attempting to put things back in order and get back to normal.

It would explain why it's so hard for Thomas to accept the witness of his friends: "We have seen the Lord." The joyful confession of the other disciples may have seemed like oh-so-much wishful thinking to this hardboiled realist. Which is why, when one-week later Jesus came and stood among them, I wonder if the noticeable change in Thomas's tune is less about simply coming to faith – to belief – and more about realizing that, after the resurrection, reality itself had changed and there would be no normal to go back to.

For how do you even talk about "normal" when someone has been raised from the dead? What can possibly be the same? Your work, your sense of meaning, your relationships, your purpose, your view of past, present, and future – all of it is changed irrevocably by God's act of resurrection.

When Thomas confesses, "My Lord and my God," he is abandoning all his conceptions of "normal" and opening himself to a very different reality than he could have previously ever imagined.

And here is the promise for us. Here is the promise – the good news for us – today and each tomorrow: Jesus comes to us.

Jesus comes to us...yes in this time of pandemic, yes into our communities and our fearful hearts, into the airless tombs in which we dwell, behind the shut and locked doors.

Here is the promise – the good news: Jesus comes to us, bearing the marks of suffering and death, revealing that the body of Christ, though risen, is always wounded.

Here is the promise: Jesus comes to us, speaking a word of peace and revealing the startling truth for our present and future, that what is true of Jesus will be true for those who bear Christ's name.

Here is the good news: Jesus comes to us, with a word of forgiveness, with grace that unbinds the clenched heart, with love that loosens the power of death, with mercy that unbars the doors we shut and swings them wide open.

Jesus comes among us...and is with us amid necessary changes and faithful adaptations, calling us forward, blessing us to believe though we do not see, and promising to be with us.

*Alleluia! Christ is risen. Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia!*

In Christ Jesus –  
Shalom, +Larry

*"The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13*