

Sermon 4.19.20

This much I know is true

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you O Lord.

Do you remember the game we used to play with infants called peek-a-boo? You hold your hands in front of your face while looking at them and then suddenly remove your hands and say peek a boo. Our son would burst into hysterical laughter when we did this. And for months he never got tired of it. When he was older, he would reach for our hands to pull them down to see if we were there. And then finally, sadly, he outgrew the game.

Psychologists tell us that when a baby is young, they have no idea that you are still there when you hide your face. They lack what is called object permanence; the concept that things still exist when we are directly looking at them. That we do not need direct visual contact to believe in their reality.

Think how difficult it would be to live in a world where we are not quite sure the refrigerator is still in the kitchen. Or our car is in the driveway. Or our children are in their beds. Or our God is in our world.

In this morning's psalm we are asking for God to protect and keep us. "Keep me safe, my God for in you I take refuge." For this prayer to have meaning we must know that there is a God who will hear us and care enough for us that He will keep us safe. Is God there? Does he disappear if we do not believe? Does he disappear if we doubt? If we become angry at Him? If we despair?

Thomas in our gospel this morning doubted what he was told about Jesus' resurrection and appearance to the apostles until he had actually seen Jesus and touched him himself. He would not believe the testimony of those he was closest to as friends and companions. He would not believe having seen of all that Jesus did in his years as a disciple. During his years with Jesus, Thomas had seen the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, leprosy healed, even the dead raised. Yet even this did not convince him that this resurrection was possible.

Once before in the gospels, Thomas had questioned Jesus. Thomas was logical and he struggled with how things would work; things that defied what he knew of

the world but that Jesus had promised. He needed constant reassurance to believe. In John 14: 1-6 we hear Thomas question Jesus when Jesus is reassuring his disciples that he would take care of them. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God¹; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus answered with the beautiful words, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

So Thomas needs to be reassured. He needs to see and touch Jesus to know that this is all real. He needs to see the face behind the hands to know that Jesus is still there. And He still is.

But what about us today? Do we ever wonder where God is in the midst of the pandemic. When good people: health care workers, fathers and mothers, even children are dying. When we need to fear being with each other because any one of us could be the carrier of death. When we cannot see a way back to living and working together in community?

Do we ever wonder where God is? Has He stepped out? If we look behind the hands, is He still there? Like Thomas, do we need more reassurance that God still protects and loves us?

Well, we can look behind the hands. We can see the face of God is still there. We can see it in the faces of the health care workers putting their lives on the line to save those who are in desperate need of medical care. We can see it in the faces of the emergency workers still on duty to protect us, though it means possible infection for themselves. We can see in the face of the ladies at Boyers checking us out so that we can have food for our families. And the volunteers handing our food at the drive through food pantry so families in need can eat. We can see it online in a zoom meeting in the faces of our own families and those we love. They are the heart and hands of God in our world today.

How can we, ourselves, also be the hands and heart of God in the world today? Some of us are on the front lines, but many of us serve by being at home, obeying the mandate of separation to keep ourselves and others safe. How can we show Christian love in this time of testing?

We can first and always pray. We can unite with Christians around the world in prayer for protection and wisdom. We can take seriously all the recommendations of those who are guiding us through this pandemic. We can be in contact with others: phone calls, notes, zoom meetings; especially those who are alone. Make 3 phone calls a week to people you know who may be lonely or who would just be happy to hear your voice. You can donate. Donate to help St. Johns' meet our bills during this time. Donate to the food pantry. Donate to one of many causes that need funding both locally and internationally.

And finally: how should Christians show love toward one another and the world? Even when the cat has erased your memo on the computer. Even when the store is out of toilet paper, or worse yet, cat food. Even when there are no sports on TV and you cannot bake another loaf of bread. Even then Paul tells us in Corinthians 13:4-7 that "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." It might be a good idea to copy this and put it on the refrigerator for all to see as these days wear on.

God is among us 24/7 through this. God is our refuge and our strength. God can never forget any one of us. We have this promise from God. Quoting from my favorite verse from Isaiah: 49: 16. God tells us "Behold, I have engraved you on the palm of my hands."

So even when we cannot see God face to face to make sure He is there, we can see His hands and His heart among us in the faces and actions of the multitude of heroes in this pandemic. And He sees us always and is always with us.

Praised be the Lord forever.

Amen.

