

“Love Is Blind?”

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Presbyterian Church in Leonia via Facebook Live

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1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

A week has passed since the resurrection of Jesus, and the disciples are all sheltering in place behind locked doors. Imagine the disciples were from the Presbyterian Church in Leonia, huddled together in the Fireplace Room out of fear of whatever lay outside.

I can imagine Jane and Susan making sure everything is warm and tidy. Hyung Kune, Jonathan and Joe would make sure our wifi access was optimal. Jihyun would be searching for the larger meaning and asking why, period. Anne would be recalling a document she has in her house up the street that is from a Session meeting 27 years ago when they made an emergency plan for a time such as this. Venge would offer predictions based on his economic research at the UN on how long this would last. Vicky, in one of her T-shirts featuring a cat on it, would join Keyla to rummage through the kitchen to make sure all could be fed. Suzanne would be asking why we hadn't traded out the picture above the fireplace yet before we were quarantined. Ingrid would be figuring out how to make beauty out of the situation. Philip would be interviewing each person in the room. The children would express their nervous energy by running amok, with the older kids showing the little kids where the sweets are hidden, and then they would all converge in the Tower Room to bounce on sofas and play games on the dry erase board-- until Jeff and Judy would team up to get the children calmly making crafts. Pete would be finding useful projects that he could work on for the time being, but would keep getting distracted with each person in his path as he remembered a story he wanted to tell them. Betsy would be cracking jokes left and right to mask how scared she was. Ammal would be in intense prayer, and Jack would be volunteering to read scripture. Michael would be quoting philosophers, scientists, theologians, and the Grateful Dead to make sense of it all. Trish would start strumming her guitar to make some calm, saying she really doesn't have anything to play but people would sit beside her and just start singing anyway.

I could go on and on as I think of each of you, and how you might behave if we were sheltering in place in the church together. When we are afraid, our personalities may become more intense, or we may become more withdrawn, or we get stuck on that one thing that we cannot let go of until we have some sense of mastery or control over the

situation. The first verse of our gospel passage tells us how fearful the disciples felt as they waited behind locked doors, not really knowing what was coming next.

I hope it's ok that I poke a little gentle fun at some of our church members. Some churches have the tradition of making the Sunday after Easter Holy Humor Sunday. I've never been in a church that has done that, and I admit that I used to think that churches that did make this Sunday about laughter were more interested in entertainment than in taking the gospel seriously. But I recently read an article that explains the origins of this celebration actually go back hundreds of years. As far back as the Middle Ages, priests would deliberately use amusing stories and jokes in sermons, causing laughter in the congregation; it was a way of celebrating the Resurrection as a supreme joke God played on Satan by raising Jesus from the dead. Also, it was believed that the laughter would chase the devil away-- they believed Satan absolutely couldn't stand laughter, because if you laughed at the evil one, he had no power over you.

I love this interpretation, and I have seen that wisdom repeated through history, especially under oppressed people; they found that when they laughed at their oppressor, their souls felt a little freer from the chains that held them-- which could lead them to find freedom in their bodies, too.

To be honest, besides poking a little fun at some of the personalities in our congregation, I haven't been feeling much like a comedian these days. But I love this idea-- to find a place in our souls where we can laugh, and in laughing find some freedom from what is holding us captive. Our lesson from 1 Peter speaks of an inheritance we as Christians hold that is imperishable; it cannot be destroyed. He acknowledges that there will be suffering; we will even be put to the fire. But Christ's revelation-- though we cannot see it-- will grant us "indescribable and glorious joy."

Not being able to see it is hard, though! And our friend Thomas really struggled with that. He came late to the party, so he missed the moment when Jesus appeared to the disciples and blew upon them, offering the breath of the Holy Spirit, and telling them "Peace be with you." Thomas had no sense of that peace; he was still stuck in the moment of fear. Even the reports of his fellow disciples couldn't convince him. "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!"

And so, a week later, Jesus came again, blowing the Spirit and offering his peace. And for the sake of Thomas, who had to see and touch to believe, Jesus offered his wounds for Thomas to see, to touch, and believe. And then, Thomas did.

Some of my friends have been telling me they enjoyed binge-watching a show called Love Is Blind while stuck in quarantine. Chris and I tried to watch it, but reality TV usually puts me to sleep. Still, I am intrigued by the concept: it's a dating show like The Bachelor, except the contestants begin dating without seeing each other; sitting in pods that separate them from one another, they interview potential partners, and it is only through the chemistry of their words-- not the visual attraction-- that they can pick their match. I imagine Thomas would be terrible at this show. He would end up alone, because he needed that visual connection, that touch, in order to feel love.

We aren't that different from Thomas, which is a big reason why this time of isolation is so difficult. We long to see and to touch one another, and to be seen and be touched too. I knew it was getting bad when I got a clothing catalogue in the mail, and instead of chucking it into the recycle bin as I normally do, I flipped through the pages looking at the models thinking, "Finally, guests have come to our home!" and wondering if maybe I should name them.

But Thomas isn't the only reflection of who we are in this story. Jesus is a reflection, too. In Christ, God came and put on human flesh. Jesus lived and loved as we do; he also suffered wounds and died as we do. And so, in a sense, Jesus' wounds are a reflection of our wounds, too.

This time of pandemic is traumatic for everyone. We will leave it scarred and wounded. But we know from the Easter story that in the resurrection, Jesus still carries his wounds with him-- but he has life! He has defeated the powers of death. We know from this testimony that the salvation Jesus offers will not cause our wounds to go away, but it will teach us how to have life again, even while bearing our wounds.

So if we have trouble mastering a blind faith, a love for Christ without seeing the proof of his presence, maybe that is okay. Perhaps it will even be *in* the touching and tending of our wounds that we will be reminded of how much God loves us, that God was willing to live among us even if that meant God would be wounded too.

And though our wounds may remind us of how fragile our bodies and minds and spirits may be, they also remind us that we have something in us that no scar can harm. We have received the breath of the Spirit, giving us peace, and constantly beckoning us to

the life and the love Jesus offers. So, go ahead and laugh. Death won't be with us forever. Thanks be to God. Amen.