

**Another Word.. April 14, 2020**

Dear First Christian Church,

We pray you are continuing to be safe, secure, and not going too stir-crazy. Hope you can get out, take a walk, and enjoy the days that God has so graciously made for us to enjoy. Do remember to call each other. Staying in contact will bring us closer not only with each other, but with God.

With the new directive to stay at home through April, Brian and I will continue to video church services and post them on our website and with links on our Facebook page. You may also Google "YouTube" and type in "First Christian Ashland Ohio".

We hope you were blessed with our Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter services. I want to personally thank Paige and Shelley Carpenter, Lana Bell, Linda Gardner, and Brian Nabors who all contributed in making them special. We are planning a hymn sing for April 19. If you have a special hymn you would like to hear, email the title back to us by Thursday.

For those who don't have access to the internet, I will continue to send out these updates. Keep the "cards of encouragement" for those in our nursing homes coming (you may now mail them directly to any nursing home). Your tithes and offerings may be mailed to the church, or you can visit our website and click on "Give Now" (PayPal) at the bottom.

Please call with prayer concerns and praises. We all need the strength and power that comes from praying for others. Stay connected and stay safe.

May we pray:

O most Holy and gracious God. We are your children and you love us. Your love is so deep that nothing we have done, or thought to do, shall keep away the peace You give. Your love is so strong that no worldly trouble shall tear us from your arms. Your love is so precious that we shall face each day ready to live our lives in service to You. May Yours be the Glory and Honor, through Jesus, our savior who taught us to pray, Our Father in Heaven, holy is Your name. May your kingdom come; may your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those that sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory forever, Amen

We are about to enter the first Sunday after Easter. The scripture is John 20: 19-31, best known as “time to beat up ‘Doubting Thomas’ Sunday.” Every year at this time we raise an eyebrow, nod knowingly and exclaim, in righteous indignation, “how could he!” Maybe we shouldn’t judge him too quickly.

First, let’s start with the word *doubting*. For centuries it has been applied to Thomas. But in the Greek as John uses it, the word means *unbelieving*. At the tomb, Mary didn’t believe. John and Peter didn’t believe. In fact, none believed until they “saw the Lord”. Thomas wasn’t there when Jesus revealed Himself. If you are completely honest, no one believes until Jesus searches, calls our name and finds us.

Mary, and the disciples have their own encounter with Jesus. He appears to them; they rejoice and *believe* when they see the Lord. They then say the same words to Thomas that Mary first said to the disciples,

“I have seen the Lord”. But now Thomas must have his own encounter with Jesus to be able to *believe*. (as do we)

Let’s look at the word *believe*. John always uses the word *believe* as a verb, a word of action. It is never used as a noun. He intends it to be a word that reflects a relationship between Jesus and a *believer*. It is a confession that Jesus is “The word made flesh”, but also a statement concerning the relationship we need to have with “The Word”.

Jesus now appears a second time, seeking out Thomas. Thomas sees, recognizes His voice, and confesses “My Lord and My God”. Seemingly simple but very powerful words. Note the word *and*. He is acknowledging that Jesus is Lord, but also God; The Great I Am, God in the flesh. Also note the word *My*. Thomas is asserting his claim to begin a personal relationship with Jesus. All Thomas wanted (and what we all would like to have) was to see Jesus just like the others saw Him. It appears that we may be more like Thomas than we want to admit.

Finally, let’s take a look at verses 29-31. They are written for a purpose. Written for you and for me. They are written so we may *see* (through their eyes), to *ponder* what has been seen, and then to come to an *understanding*, so we may too *Believe*. On this First Sunday after Easter John’s, Thomas’, and Jesus’ words are written down that “we may *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by *believing* we may have life in His name.”

In His Peace,

*Rich*