

## God Showing Up (John 20:19-31)

Well, here we are, in the early days after Easter, having finished what one social media meme called “the Lentiest Lent we have ever Lented.” Whether you read last week’s service and sermon in our bulletin or watched it livestreamed from another congregation, whether your own heart was filled with joy or with sorrow, whether COVID-19 still feels distant to you and our congregation or we are right now walking with our people through the valley of the shadow of death—*Christ is Risen! He Risen Indeed!!*

Thanks be to God that no matter the wrenching chaos of the world, and no matter where or how or even if we mark the day, *Easter happens*. Life flourishes in the face of death, and we are offered **resurrection hope**.

I noticed this year how the Gospel accounts describe the arrival of resurrection hope for Jesus’ first friends and followers: they do not all believe and receive comfort at once in equal measure, but rather in waves.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene, then to the disciples huddled in a locked room, and then, a whole week later, to Thomas. The movement from grief to hope is different among these characters, just as it is different for each of us.

Maybe you are like Mary: vigilant, attuned to the voice of God, and ready to testify to the presence of the risen Savior. Maybe you are like the disciples, navigating fear and belief, joy and isolation, all at once, and drawing strength from your friends.

Or maybe you are like Thomas: unwilling or unable to witness to Jesus’ resurrection until your fingers can trace the scars of his crucifixion.

We say that Thomas doubts, but it seems to me that Thomas *demands*. He demands that Jesus show up for him, just like Jesus showed up for the other disciples. He demands that Jesus be present with him, too, so that the wave of resurrection hope may at last wash over him. He knows what it will take for him to believe this remarkable, ridiculous news, and he asks that Jesus provide that experience. Thomas needs to understand Jesus’ resurrection not just in his brain or even in his heart, but in his body, with his senses, his whole self.

In his stark honesty about his experience and his bold demands for God to show up, Thomas is much like the psalmists of Hebrew Scripture. The lament psalms in particular are full of direct imperatives to God, desperately demanding God’s intervention for healing from a disease or for deliverance from enemies. These are not genteel prayers or subdued hymns; these are guttural cries to be seen, heard, remembered, addressed, and delivered by God. In Psalm 35, for example, the poet cries out for God to awaken to his cause: “You have seen, O LORD; do not be silent! O Lord, do not be far from me! Wake up! Bestir yourself for my defense, for my cause, my God and my Lord!” (Psalm 35:22-23).

Psalm 13 wails “How long” four times and then demands, “Consider and answer me, O LORD my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death” (Psalm 13:3).

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus cries out from the cross with the opening line of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

As Psalm 22 continues, the psalmist describes the fear and abandonment that characterize his life, even as he reminds God—and himself—of God's past faithfulness and mighty acts. Those recitations of God's record of righteous deliverance found in many lament psalms instill hope, even as they also call God to account.

When I hear Thomas' demand, the Old Testament's cries to God ring in my ears. I hear Thomas' demand for God to show up. I hear lament. I hear a deeply biblical, deeply faithful relationship with the living God. I hear an expectation that God is alive, that God is powerful, that God cares for God's people. I hear a plea for God to show up again from someone who knows the many ways God has shown up for God's people in the past. We should not imagine that because it is Easter, we must shut our "how long, O Lords" in the box where we kept the "alleluias" during Lent.

A remarkable thing happens when Thomas demands that Jesus show up and present his wounds: Jesus does show up! And he fulfills Thomas' need. Jesus answers Thomas' honest, doubting demands with compassion and presence. In response, Thomas exclaims—much like the voice in Psalm 35 — "My Lord and my God!"

In most lament psalms, the complaint eventually gives way to words of trust, hope, or praise. This is Thomas' movement, too. His grief-filled demand turns into a testimony about the faithfulness of God.

I think it is time we demand that God show up and bring our pandemic-weary world some resurrection hope. Surrounded as we are by sickness, fear, and death, we have plenty of things to lament. But we have also witnessed God's saving acts in the world throughout history.

Christians testify that the very same God who divided the waters of the sea so that the Hebrew people could escape Pharaoh's grasp has also raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

You know what God can do! I will keep reminding you what God can do, but you also need to **remind God what God can do**. Pray...Lament. Witness to your family, your friends, your neighbors. Demand that God show up for our hurting, feverish, unemployed, grieving, lonely world, and may Christ's resurrection hope bring us peace, comfort, joy, and strength during these troubling times.

Yes, keep praying, keep asking God to show up and give us strength to keep on witnessing to our faith so others "might come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing they may have life in his name." John 20:31

Let us pray,

Pastor: Lord, you have commanded us to pray, and you have promised to hear us, so we come to you in complete confidence and boldness, asking that you act as you have always done throughout history and come to our help as we face this Coronavirus Pandemic. Assure

us of your presence and grant us your strength and especially give us the wisdom and knowledge to be your witnesses to our congregation and to our community. Many people are searching for something to believe in these days, so help us to point to you as our Savior and Lord. In Jesus strong name we pray.

**People: AMEN!**