



Spirit of Hope

Mount Hope Lutheran Church

April 14, 2021

Then Jesus told him (Thomas), "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me." John 20:29

If you're like me, you might think about how much easier it must have been to follow Jesus and to believe the incredible account of His resurrection. I think I would be like Thomas and prefer to put my fingers in His wounds and to put my hand in His side. But, no, we live by faith. Our message in worship yesterday included a look at Thomas' story and we also discussed our place in the story.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us that "Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see." Do you ever think about the evidence of your own faith? It is incredible that we are evidence for each other just as Jesus presented the evidence to Thomas. Even though we might feel it would have been better to live with the disciples, in their time, walking with Jesus, we are blessed to be right where we are.

Jesus said, But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. It is better for us that we are living now by the power of the Holy Spirit. We can be grateful and celebrate our place in history and the work the Lord has given us. The full message is included in this newsletter.

As we move into our second year of COVID-19 challenges, we are slowly working to resume "normal" practices. We do plan to continue for the month of April our worship times of 8:15 and 10:45. We are hopeful that another in-person option will allow more to return to church as more are vaccinated and many resume pre-COVID activities. As always, though, we understand and support each individual decision and comfort level with being in public spaces. Corona virus is still a threat and appears that it will continue to be for some time. We will have Bible study between services this week, 9:30-10:30.

Invite a guest to join us in person at 8:15 or 10:45 each Sunday or via live streaming on our YouTube page Mount Hope Lutheran Church - YouTube or catch it at a later time either on our website mthopelutheran.org or call for a DVD copy. Remember, there are a lot of people "out there" who need to hear the Good News of Jesus.

You may have noticed that we have begun offering communion on Sundays and we plan to continue this practice. However, if you are unable to participate on Sundays, we will offer private communion by appointment during the week for those who are able to come in to church. Please contact the church office to get your spot to receive Holy Communion, Wednesday, April 14.

Also, I plan to resume home visits as facilities allow and as you are comfortable with those visits. As always, the Lord's Supper will be included.

"Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:57

We are Mount Hope, Where Guests become Friends, Friends become Family!

Serving together,

Pastor Fran Green

April 11, 2021 Sunday Message

We hear these words today in our gospel reading...*Then Jesus told him (Thomas), "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me." John 20:29*

Do you feel blessed today? I don't know about you but, I think I would rather put my finger here or put my hand in His side. But, no, Jesus says we're blessed.

That is a great and comforting statement wouldn't you say? Yes, I do believe!! *2 Corinthians 5:7, "For we live by believing and not by seeing."*

Hebrews 11:1, "Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me!"

The Gospel story is really quite fascinating and so important and relevant for us today. We hear of the growing numbers of "skeptics" or nones; those who simply do not believe in Jesus; the latest study by the Gallup organization reports the now fewer than half of our U.S. population belong to a church down from 70% in the 1990s. And that number is expected to grow in the wake of COVID-19. New atheism is growing. Ever since the time of Thomas there have been those who did not and could not believe Jesus had risen from the dead. But, any Christianity that is not rooted in the RESURRECTION OF JESUS is not true Christianity.

The disciples knew that too and people throughout time have always known that. We hear it in the Scriptures and today in particular we hear of Thomas' skepticism. Even though the women and disciples told Thomas that Jesus was alive and had appeared to them; he knew that dead people stayed dead. No, there had to be another explanation and he would never believe Jesus was alive, unless Jesus showed himself with all of the marks he endured while suffering and dying.

Jesus' resurrection cannot be so simply dismissed. No, there is simply too much evidence that demands an answer. Interestingly, many famous atheists, like Richard Dawkins, when asked what they will say if they find out there is a God and they stand before Him; the answer is always, "You didn't give me enough evidence."

One cannot simply dismiss the resurrection account. HERE IS A QUESTION THAT DEMANDS AN ANSWER!! "How do you explain the empty tomb?" Simple question, right? The question demands an answer from all of us, FROM ALL PEOPLE. Make no mistake there is much evidence.

Thomas was wrestling with this question after hearing the reports of his friends and he like so many made up his mind dead people do not come back to life.

So, we all know that. If that's true, then there are only two explanations for the empty tomb if Jesus did not rise from the dead.

First, Jesus did not really die; he perhaps only appeared to die or someone stepped in and took over for Him, as the Quran states, something like that.

Second, he died, but did not rise, someone or a group took His body away. These are the arguments and positions taken today and also the ones held throughout time. Let's look at each.

First, our Scriptures clearly record that Jesus did in fact die on the cross. The four gospels, Paul, the entire N.T. are clear in stating that Jesus died on a cross. Second, it is rooted in history. Jewish historians, Greek historians, and Roman historians all talk about the crucifixion of Jesus, HE DID TRULY DIE ON A ROMAN CROSS. Finally, Roman soldiers knew how to kill people they were very good at it. There is really no way one can claim that Jesus of Nazareth did not die on a cross. It is well documented and rooted in history.

Now the other position, Jesus died, but did not rise, His body was taken; therefore, the empty tomb is of course empty because His followers wanted to perpetuate the story. There are several responses that prove this is in fact, not true; but, let's look at a few. First, is the appearances and testimony of the early witnesses. Jesus appeared to the women, the disciples, and today we read of Thomas.

These people were all skeptics, they knew that Jesus was dead and yet Jesus appeared to them risen from the dead. They all suffered greatly for their faith and all but John would take that belief to their own deaths dying as martyrs. They knew Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to them.

Second, there is documentation outside of the Scriptures that His followers worshipped Jesus as a God offering evidence outside of the Scriptures that His followers believed they had seen the risen Lord.

Third, from the earliest times – even today, we see that Jesus' followers worshipped Him on the eighth day, Sunday, the day of the Resurrection. That tradition was established one week after Jesus' resurrection. That is significant. Jesus' resurrection divides time in our world, BC and AD; the event is that significant.

Finally, the testimony of Paul is important. He confirms the resurrection account of Jesus was well established within one year or two of the actual events. It could not have been a fabrication made up years after Jesus' death. Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 15:3-7**: ***“For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.*”**

No, it seems pretty clear – Jesus did really die! It is equally as clear – Jesus did really rise from the dead! History, including the Scriptures are quite clear. Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed, Halleluia! THAT IS HOW WE ANSWER THE QUESTION, “How do you explain THE EMPTY TOMB?”

Now, most of you know this and I am preaching to the choir so to speak. But, this is significant and I hope that it strengthens our faith today. I hope we grow knowing that our faith in Jesus and the resurrection is not a fantasy.

Further, since that is true, now what? Everything must change!! We must begin as Thomas proclaiming, My Lord and My God!! Fully surrendering to Him. But, is this REALLY our belief? We've talked about this mouthful of a term in the past:

FUNCTIONAL ATHEISM-The belief that everything depends upon us. We may profess a belief...but we must DO. What can I do? (I have many personal examples-Mount Hope where I worry and “function” as if everything depends on me.) What about you? Don't we tend to trust our own works vs. Grace? Thomas, “Unless I put my finger-ME.” Jesus changes his functional atheism into faith, by grace.

This is the goal of John in his gospel. No less than 98 times he uses the verb “believe”. We read all throughout Lent and even today, ***“But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:31***

Who do you know that does not believe or who struggles with skepticism? Functional atheism? Begin with the question, HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE EMPTY TOMB? There is only one answer really, Jesus is Lord!

The reality is that even our arguments or presentation of these facts can become WORKS, my/our debating skills versus another’s. That’s where Paul begins in *1 Corinthians*. Jews demand a sign, Greeks wisdom. But, we preach Christ crucified. The power of the resurrection! It is God’ doing! Not yours or mine.

The next goal comes immediately after believing. That by believing you may have LIFE in his name. The resurrection changes everything! ***John 20:22, “When he had said this, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”***

NEW CREATION by the breath of Jesus. Hear the similarities between this and ***Genesis 2:7, “Then the LORD GOD formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being.”*** We receive this life and we pass on this life as we live for Him. Our faith is evidence, just as Jesus showing Thomas His wounds. Now we live for Him by the power of the resurrection.

John 13:34-35, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 15:15-17, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”

LIFE!! NEW CREATION!!! EMPOWERED AND FREE TO LIVE FOR JESUS AS WE LIVE AS HE LIVED – LOVING AND SERVING OTHERS. These works are not ours!! They are the grace of our Lord Jesus in and through us, we are totally dependent upon Him.

How will you live as a new creation? How can you live out and share this transforming grace in your daily life? I’d like to close with a few words, again from scholar NT Wright:

Jesus is risen, therefore God’s new world has begun.

Jesus is risen, therefore Israel and the world have been redeemed.

Jesus is risen, therefore his followers have a new job to do.

And what is that new job? To bring the life of heaven to birth in actual, physical earthly reality.

Let us proclaim with Thomas today both verbally and through our actions: MY LORD AND MY GOD!! AMEN.

As always, we will make our service available online. If you are not comfortable with attending at this time or are part of a high-risk population, the safest place for you is in your home.

To Watch LIVE: Youtube: [Mount Hope Lutheran Church - YouTube](#)

To Watch After on the WEB:

Youtube: [Mount Hope Lutheran Church - YouTube](#)

Facebook: [Mount Hope Lutheran Church, Bloomington, MN | Facebook](#)

Instagram: on your phone at Mount Hope Lutheran Church

Website: [Mount Hope Lutheran Church – Minneapolis, MN \(mthopelutheran.org\)](#)

Announcements

Altar Flowers

The new 2021 Flower Calendar is up on the bulletin board in the information hallway. Please sign up for a date that you would like to recognize a special date or want to beautify the church. The arrangements are \$30.-Make your check payable to The Women of Hope and place it and your dedication in Karen Mack's mailbox or call her at 952-831-7428. There are many spots available to choose from. Sign up today!

Flowers given on Sunday, April 18 are given by Renata Melby--in celebration of 3 family birthdays in April.

HYMN Bible Study

Our next HYMN Bible Study will be on Tuesday, April 20th at 6:30 pm. We will be meeting in the sanctuary again to be able to maintain our 6ft. social distancing. Please read Month 6. We will be completing the Month 6 Monthly Reflection together.

Back to 2 Sunday Services

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." Matthew 18:20

Two services will be offered on Sundays at 8:15 and 10:45 am. These services will be exactly the same. Pick the time that works for you! We are so glad that many of you will be able to meet again to Worship God in-person with the fellowship with other believers!

"What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up." 1 Corinthians 14:26 NIV

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." Exodus 20:8-11

Support Mount Hope's Ministry

By giving to Mount Hope's Ministry you are supporting missions here in Bloomington, MN and throughout the world! Your generous offering, tithes and donations are so appreciated and will be used prayerfully in a God-pleasing way.

Donate by: In Person During the Worship Service on Sundays Offering Basket or Online (One-time or Recurring)

Go to Mount Hope's Website at:

[Online Giving – Mount Hope Lutheran Church \(mthopelutheran.org\)](http://mthopelutheran.org)

<https://www.mthopelutheranchurch.org/giving>

Other Ways To Give:

You can mail a gift to our main office. Please send any mailed gifts to the following address:

Mt. Hope Lutheran Church

Attn: Finance

3601 W Old Shakopee Rd

Bloomington, MN 55431

Amazon Smile

Use Amazon Smile whenever you shop online with Amazon.com. Select "Mount Hope Lutheran Church" and Amazon will donate to the church.

Thank you for your continued generosity.

International Friendship Center

The International Friendship Center meets here at Mount Hope Lutheran Church and has now begun meeting in person once again. The Center offers citizenship classes, English classes, knitting classes, cooking classes, computer classes, and sewing classes. No matter where you are from...you are welcome to attend our free classes! If you would like to volunteer and help, please call our missionaries: Nadar at 402-968-6486 or Georgette at 402-889-6162.



INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP CENTERS (IFC)

JOIN US for FREE CLASSES



 **CITIZENSHIP**

ENGLISH 

 **COMPUTER**

KNITTING 

 **COOKING**

SEWING 

Locations:



BLOOMINGTON

Mount Hope Lutheran Church
3601 W Old Shakopee Rd
Bloomington, MN 55431



BURNSVILLE

Lutheran Church of the Ascension
1801 East Cliff Road
Burnsville, MN 55337



PRIOR LAKE

Holy Cross Lutheran Church
14085 Pike Lake Trail
Prior Lake, MN 55372



COMLUMBIA HEIGHTS

St. Matthew Lutheran Church
4101 Washington Street NE,
Columbia Heights, 55421



ST. CLOUD Coming soon!

Location to be determined

Sunday Worship Schedule

9:30am In-Person Worship

Services Online at

www.mthopelutheran.org/sermons

Phone: 952-888-5059

E-mail: church@mthopelutheran.org

Website: www.mthopelutheran.org

Youtube Channel: Mount Hope
Lutheran Church

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