

Interactive lesson



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/close-up-shot-of-a-handshake-5313361/>;
photo credit olia danilevich

What is happening in this picture?

Why would people do that?

Does it make what was happening more real?

What sense does it give you, when you shake hands?

What did Peter tell the crowds and those to whom he wrote in today's readings?

In his letter he said, "Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

Who is it that he says we love?

How do we know that Jesus rose from the dead?

What kind of proof or reassurance did you receive, to give you the sense the resurrection story is true?

Does not having hard proof make it any less true?

Blessed indeed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe! May you live always held in the hand of God, assured of the salvation of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Gospel lesson

We continue reading today from the Gospel of John, after Jesus rose from the dead.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-appears-thomas/>

John 20:19-31 NRSV

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen

the Lord." But he said to them, "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."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

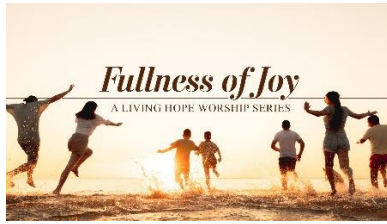
³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Joy to the World"

UMH #246

Message: Fullness of Joy



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/a-living-hope/second-sunday-of-easter-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/second-sunday-of-easter-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Source of our greatest joy,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may joyfully share the news of Your incredible grace with all whom we encounter. Amen.

We celebrate this Easter season in "A Living Hope," beginning with "Fullness of Joy":

"We're still basking in the glow.

Maybe we're exhausted from the excesses of the Easter celebration.

But we're still celebrating, or we should be."



picture from MMMS collection

Last week you heard me talk about how I was anticipating the imminent birth of my first grandchild. Vivian was born later that day via c-

section, and the exhausted parents texted to let everyone know.

Do you think I believed she was born because I was told about it? Of course I did, though it hardly felt like anything had changed. I immediately requested a picture so that I could see what she looked like.

Tim and Tiffany dutifully sent a picture for everyone to see how adorable she is. But do you think a picture is enough for a new grandma to feel like she knows her grandchild, or that her grandchild knows her? I wanted more of a connection.



picture from MMMS collection

The next day I was up at the hospital to see my new granddaughter in person, to hold her, to hear her, to smell her, and to let her see, feel, hear, and smell me. I fell in love with her instantly.

I wonder if God feels that way every time someone claims Jesus as their Savior and gives their lives over to the Holy Spirit's care.

The disciples had been told about Jesus being raised from the dead, and Peter and others had seen the empty tomb, but it was not quite real to them at first. So Jesus appeared to a group of them, greeting

them with restorative peace, restoring their lives to wholeness again. Thomas was not there, but he was told about it by the others who had been.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-appears-thomas/> and palm spot added

Was that enough for the good news to be believed by Thomas? Nope! He did not have the sense of Jesus being alive. Like a deal not being sealed until one person shakes the hand of the other, Thomas said he needed to reach out and touch Jesus. A verbal picture was not enough for him to feel assured of the truth.

A week later, Jesus was in front of Thomas, inviting him to reach out and touch Him. The story does not say that Thomas actually did that, but there is no doubt that Thomas's faith in Jesus's resurrection was established. Their relationship was enriched and strengthened in a fundamental way. Thomas fell into worship of Jesus instantly. "My Lord and my God!"

Most people struggle with understanding what they have not directly experienced for themselves. After living in a sin-filled world, descriptions of God's heavenly kingdom seem too good to be true.



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/positive-diverse-people-making-faces-at-camera-3856033/>; photo credit: Matheus Bertelli

Can you imagine a world where everyone loves one another without fear and strives to nurture each other? Where all blessings are freely shared because there is assurance that everyone will have enough, and no one stockpiles for themselves at anyone else's expense? Where everyone considers others' needs before just doing or taking what they want?

That is how we were created to live, and what Jesus makes possible for us again. Peter and the other apostles proclaimed this good news to everyone after Jesus commissioned them to.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” (1 Peter 1:3-4)

We do not need to live in fear and uncertainty! Jesus put out His hand and assures us of the truth, that God loves us and, like a new grandparent, wants to have a loving, healthy relationship with us so that we can flourish in joy.

If you are not already sure of that, then seek God and ask for reassurance. Disregard the lies of the sinful world, that faith is somehow a private thing that you cannot talk about. Do not fall into the trap

of striving to keep material possessions at the expense of personal relationships!

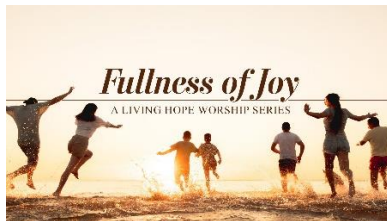


picture from MMMS collection

Accept Jesus into your heart as your personal Savior yet again, and do as He taught:

- † Pray as He taught us to pray.
- † Tell others the Good News, that you too can be part of making disciples of all nations.
- † Forgive others, and
- † Let their faith develop in their own timing, trusting the Holy Spirit to work with them.
- † Praise and give glory to God in all that you do.

Live in the fullness of joy found in God's presence.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/a-living-hope/second-sunday-of-easter-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/second-sunday-of-easter-year-a-graphics>

Use all of your senses, including those of the Spirit, to experience the holiness of God which Jesus brought to you and to the entire world. Celebrate Easter, for our hope for new life has been fulfilled. Alleluia!

in Jesus. Amen.