

WELCOME: Welcome to Germantown Church of God, in Cascade, MD. I am glad that you have decided to join us today. May God bless our time together today. May we be filled with an awareness of His presence as we are gathered together for Worship and Study.

We are continuing in this season of Shelter in Place, due to the spread of the Corona Virus. We have suspended our public, face to face activities and services. It has been difficult to not be able to go about our normal activities and not to be able to see our family and friends. But we understand the importance of staying in, to protect ourselves, and slow down the spread of the disease. This season will not last forever, and we will be able to resume contact with family and friends in due time. The challenge we face in this time is to use this time for good. Read, spend time in the Bible, pray, check in with others by phone or email. I continue to challenge you to commit to come out of this time a better person, a stronger person. I encourage you again to check in with friends. Check in with other members of our Church family. If you need help, please ask. If you need food, or help with an errand, please call. Some of you may be at a point in life where you are not able to offer to help someone else with food or with an errand. I believe you still have an opportunity to bless others. You can call friends – thank them for their friendship, ask about their family, pray for them.

Thank you for giving

Check our Web Page or Facebook Page for information

INVITATION TO WORSHIP

Psalm 150

Prayer

Isaiah 26:3

SCRIPTURE READING

John 20:19-31

MESSAGE

What does a “good Christian” look like? What does a “perfect Christian” look like. I know, nobody is perfect, but we use that word sometimes to imagine something Good. We probably have some ways that we would describe what a good Christian is supposed to look like. Here are some of the characteristics we might include:

- Strong Faith –
- Always full of joy
- Always loving
- Always at Peace
- Always hopeful

But as we are discovering life is not always easy. There are hard times and hard days. And sometimes Faith is Hard. Sometimes Joy is hard, or love is hard, or peace is hard, or Hope is hard. Right now you may be finding it difficult to be a good Christian, let alone a perfect Christian. I want to talk about that for the next few weeks. Today my subject is ***When Faith is Hard***.

One of the things we discover when we read the Bible is that the people in the Bible were not perfect people. They struggled to be people of faith, and people of joy, and loving people.... They teach us some lessons about getting through times when it is hard to be a “good Christian”. I want to talk today about someone for whom Faith was Hard.

Last Sunday was Easter Sunday. We celebrated the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. As we saw last week, after his resurrection, Jesus made several appearances to His followers. We learn that Jesus continued to walk and talk among His disciples for a period of 40 days after his resurrection until He ascended into heaven. This text that we read today, tells us of two of those Post Resurrection appearances. The first appearance is on that first day, what we would call Easter day. Earlier in the day, Mary Magdalene had seen the Lord. Now, on the evening of that first day, some of Jesus' followers were gathered together in a room. The doors were locked. John – who would have been there among that group – tells us that the doors were locked for fear of the Jews. These followers of Jesus were fearful that the Jewish leaders who had been responsible for putting Jesus to death, might come after them and arrest them, or have them killed, so they wouldn't be spreading wild stories about this Jesus whom they had crucified. While they were in this room, Jesus suddenly appears to them. And He wasn't just a figment of their imagination. It was really Jesus. They all could see him and touch him. They were convinced that it was actually Him and He was alive. They were overjoyed.

But not all of the disciples were there. There were at least 2 that were not there. Judas of course was not there. He was the betrayer, and he had hung himself. And one of the disciples named Thomas was not there. He missed out on seeing Jesus. We are not told why Thomas was not there. We do know that some of the men who had followed Jesus were walking away. Luke tells us about 2 of Jesus' followers who left Jerusalem and were on their way to Emmaus. The thought Jesus was the One, they were waiting for, the Messiah. But when he died, they concluded that He was not. So they were going home. Thomas may have experienced those same feelings. He thought Jess was the one, but now He is dead. So Thomas must have been wrong. No reason to hang out with the other followers any longer. Perhaps he too was fearful, and was taking his own measures to protect himself. Perhaps he is so grief stricken, he just wanted to be by himself. We don't know for sure why he wasn't there. But sometime over the course of the next few days, some of the disciples found Thomas and told him that Jesus was alive. Thomas refused to believe it. They were just making it up. They had been duped. Dead people don't come back to life. So Thomas issues a challenge: ***“Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I WILL NOT BELIEVE IT!!!!”*** He would not be persuaded.

We might find it a bit strange that Thomas does not believe. We don't know how he came to be a follower of Jesus. We don't read about that first encounter he had with Jesus. When the lists of 12 are recorded in the gospels, his name is included. So Thomas has left whatever life he had before he met Jesus and had become a devoted follower of Jesus. There was a time, not too long before Jesus' death when Thomas **shows some of his courage and faith**. Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples protested. “Lord, they just tried to kill you there!” But Thomas challenges them: ***“Let us also go with him that we might die with him!”*** So Thomas has demonstrated faith and commitment to Jesus. But now his faith is wavering. He is filled with doubt. He had come to a moment with Faith was Hard.

Let's talk about Faith for a moment. Faith means to TRUST. It is more than just believing some facts about God. Faith means to Trust God. As you read the Bible, you learn that Faith is a pretty significant term. We learn that we come into a relationship with God through Faith – Faith in Jesus. John 3:16 – ***For God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.*** This is what we sometimes call Saving Faith. We believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be – the Son of God. We believe that His death on the cross was a sacrifice for sins, that God accepted His death as payment for our sins and grants forgiveness and pardon and adoption, to all who put their faith in Jesus.

Sometimes the Bible talks about Faith in another way. In Matthew 17:20, Jesus says: ***I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from***

here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. Matthew 17:20. So to have faith is to believe that God can intervene and demonstrate His power to those who believe. This is what Thomas is struggling with. He simply was not able to believe that God would intervene, that God could or would restore a dead person to life again. **Why doesn't he believe?** Why was faith so hard for Thomas? Perhaps his heartbreak and grief were too heavy to believe something so wonderful. Perhaps it is the disappointment that Thomas felt with Jesus. Perhaps it is the "bigness" of the event that prevented him from believing. He simply cannot believe that dead people could come back to life again. Now, remember, Thomas as a follower of Jesus has already witnessed some resurrections. Jesus raised Jairus' daughter. He raised the son of a widow to life. He raised Lazarus. But for some reason, this is just too much. Things did not go the way Thomas thought they should and he could not, would not believe. Even though his friends are convinced and so certain that Jesus is alive, Thomas cannot believe it. **Faith is just too hard.**

A week later the disciples are gathered together again in the same room. Doors are still locked. They are still fearful. Nerves are on edge. This time Thomas is with them. If they haven't convinced him that Jesus is alive, they have at least convinced him that they loved him and didn't want to lose his friendship. **Once again, Jesus appears** in the room with them. He offers them the same greeting as before, "Peace be with you." Then Jesus turns his attention to Thomas. He invites him to do just what Thomas had challenged the disciples. **"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."** I don't know if Thomas actually put his finger in the nail prints, or if he put his hand into Jesus' side. But he becomes convinced that he is not just imagining, not just seeing things.. It may be that Thomas was convince as he heard Jesus invite him to believe, using the same words that Thomas had spoken. Jesus had heard him. What further proof does Thomas need. Whatever persuaded him, he is now convinced that Jesus is alive. And his response is to declare his faith in Jesus: **My Lord and My God.** Jesus concludes His interview with Thomas with this word of blessing: **"Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."** Thomas' faith is renewed by the encouragement and witness of his friends, his fellow disciples. And his faith is renewed when he realizes that Jesus does not reject him because of his doubts, when he realizes that Jesus desires to be in relationship with him. Thomas' faith is renewed when he realizes that God is able to bring dead people back to life.

Sometimes faith is hard. We find ourselves in situations that are overwhelming. Sometimes grief and discouragement are too great. Sometimes things don't go the way we had planned. Sometimes we are facing something that we think may be even too big for God to handle. **What do we do when Faith is hard.** **Don't isolate yourself.** Don't withdraw from others. I encourage you to surround yourself with friends, good friends who have experienced the power and presence of Jesus in their lives. Let their witness encourage you. And I encourage you to **ask the Lord to show you** signs that He has been present with you in the dark times, the difficult times. Thank Him that He does not abandon you in your times of doubt and fear. Ask Him to renew and strengthen your faith. Jesus said that those who believe are blessed.

Invitation – Thomas came to a point where he was able to declare that Jesus was his Lord and His God. Have you come to that place today? If not I encourage you to believe that Jesus came to be your Savior, that He died for you so that you can be forgiven. Invite Him to be your Savior today.

Closing Prayer