

Sermon Title: **Put Your Finger Here and See My Hands**

Bible: **John 20:19-29**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on Sunday, April 19, 2020

Audience: about 28 YouTube Live-streaming viewers

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, Jesus has been raised from the dead. He shows the way of life. He is with us.

Please teach us your way and your presence. Please be with my lips in your love and grace. In

Jesus' name. Amen.

1. Doubting Thomas

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples many times. I assume that today's scripture reading is one of the most popular stories. After Jesus died on the cross, the disciples were afraid and hid at home. After three days, Jesus came to the disciples, and said, "Peace be with you." The disciples saw his hands and his side. However, Thomas was not there. Thomas could not believe Jesus' resurrection had really happened. Thomas was doubting what the other disciples said about the resurrection. A week later, Jesus came again and said, "Peace be with you." Thankfully, Thomas was there. Jesus said to him the words of today's title: "Put your finger here and see my hands." Now, Thomas was able to have faith. Because of this story, Thomas has a nickname "Doubting Thomas."

2. Wesleyan Quadrilateral

We are Methodists. Our founder, John Wesley, has four different sources to understand God: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience. In the Book of Discipline, it says, “Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience and confirmed by reason.” Sometimes, these four different sources can or should be overlapped. Probably, the definition of each source can be different from our thoughts, because the understanding of four sources is very practical. For example, tradition does not mean only ancient church tradition. Tradition also means the influence from our own family tradition or our cultural tradition. In other words, our parents’ faith life or our own cultural background; in my case, Korean churches, can be a tradition. Anyway, from these four sources: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience, we can understand God, and we can be theologians. Yes, we are all theologians. Furthermore, we can see what we stand on when we do theological thinking.

3. Experience

In the story of “Doubting Thomas,” among four sources, which one is the most important? To Doubting Thomas, experience is the most important key to believing in God. Thomas wanted to see Jesus’ hands and his side. To him, to see is to believe. When we hear the nickname of “Doubting Thomas,” it sounds negative. However, when we focus on experience, we can see the power of experience. Like a witness, experience is very authentic and powerful. I think that that’s why Thomas was one of the most passionate missionaries. Some Christian Tradition holds that he might have visited India, China, and even Paraguay.

Let me share one example about how much experience is powerful. There is a fruit tree in my friend's house garden. It was not time for the fruit to be in season. So, I could not see fruit on the tree. But I wanted to know what kind of fruit tree it is. With a book, called something like the "Fruit Gardeners' Bible," I can search for it and look it up. These days, with a smartphone, after taking a picture of a leaf, I might be able to google it. This is like using Scripture. But, probably, like our home Bible has dust on it, we do not often search the tree this way. With reason, I can guess what it is, because my friend gave me some fruit last year. Or, I can just ask my friend what it is. This is very simple and easy. This can be a tradition, like learning from our parents or ancestors. Or, I can wait for the fruit until it has the fruit. When I witness the fruit in the tree, I can say what it is, like my friend. That's because I see the fruit with my own eyes. This is experience. I can learn what a fruit tree is from the book, from my guess, from asking my friend, and with my own eyes. Likewise, we can learn and understand God from the Bible, from reason, from tradition, and from experience. When it comes to confidence, in which one can we have the most confidence? (Experience)

4. Where is God?

The virus spreads all over the place: in Asia, Europe, Africa, North & South America, and Oceania. This suffering is neither a punishment for sin nor a judgement from God. We suffer and the world suffers, because we are just human beings, and because suffering is part of this world. However, we do not know why natural disasters, pandemics, or other suffering are part of our life. We all experience this suffering together. We cannot be alone. We are all connected.

There is no more “you” and no more “them.” We are all “we” and “us.” We are all one body of Christ. Then, where is our God? Where can we see God’s tears? God’s patience? Or God’s silence? Where can we see God’s healing? Can you see God’s love and care, even in this time? God is always with us. God still shows us God’s healing, love, and care. I hope for us to experience God’s presence, not only from the Bible, not only from the stories of our parents or ancestors, not just from our minds, but also from our own bodies. As Thomas put his fingers in Jesus’ hands, and reached out his hands to Jesus’ side, let us reach out our hands to where the suffering is, and where God’s healing is. Let us be there ourselves in body and spirit. God is always with us, even in the time of the unknown or suffering.

Closing Prayer

Oh, Lord, we are all suffering together. We do not know why this happens. But we do know how we love and how we care. That’s because you are with us even in this suffering. Please lead us to your healing, your love, your care, and your presence. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions.

1. Among the 4 elements of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, what is your strongest influence?
2. What is your favorite scripture or hymn?
3. Can you share your own experience of God?
4. Where is God at this time? How can we be with God?