

They are scared. And angry and sad and confused. And holed up in a house with the door closed, avoiding contact with the outside world. The world as they know it has turned upside down. Their routines up-ended, their work no longer deemed essential. The nights are long and sleep is fitful. They wonder if tomorrow will be more of the same.

They are friends of mine who have worked in the food service industry a long time. Furloughed a few weeks ago, money is now really tight. Their stimulus check hasn't arrived, and their son ~ who has Type 1 diabetes ~ needs his meds.

They whisper amongst themselves their questions, their doubts, their fears. Why? What do we do now? What's next? They are frustrated and tired and just want things to go back to the way they were.

Peace be with you, they hear. And there he is, just like Mary said, and he brings tidings of peace.

Jesus enters in the depths of their despair. They know they had fallen asleep that night in the garden when Jesus asked for them to pray for him. They had denied him. They weren't strong enough to stand in solidarity with him at the bottom of that cross and watch him die. The last time the disciples saw Jesus, the spittle of his accusers mingled with blood as it ran down his face from the crown of thorns, his body, wearied from fatigue and abuse, broken and dying.

And the first thing he says is a word of peace. And he displays his hands and his side, as if to say "I'm fine. It's fine. Everything is as it should be."

Jesus, who miraculously stands before them, has been restored. He is the embodiment of wholeness. All the stories and insights and teachings Jesus shared fall into place. What he said is true. And these disciples discover for themselves a new life in the resurrected Christ and they rejoice.

Peace be with you, he said. Jesus commissioned his followers to go out and do his work in the world ~ to go and do the next right thing ~ and he gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit so they would always be equipped to carry out that work.

Thomas, who wasn't there to witness Jesus' appearance, is dubious of his friends' claim that they (like Mary before them) have seen the Lord. Jesus was a good friend, a provocative teacher, a charismatic prophet even. But returned from the dead?

I was living in Alexandria, VA in my last year of seminary when the Pentagon (about 4 miles away as a crow flies) was hit on 9-11. That night, I sat on the roof of our seminary's administrative building and watched the Pentagon burn. I was up there with a classmate feeling disoriented, scared for my safety and that of many others I cared about; I was angry and sad and

confused. This story of Jesus appearing to the disciples ran like a loop in my mind. And I kept returning to the same question: how exactly does one abide in the peace of God in the midst of tragedy?

Up on that roof, I reflected on my day: how I saw my classmates and professors shift into gear to be helpers in the world ~ some of us showed up at the local hospital and offered to do whatever needed doing, one went down to the Pentagon and assisted the first responders, others began organizing relief efforts to help families directly impacted by the day's events, and the rest gathered in prayer. Helpers were everywhere. Jesus was everywhere.

It's nearly 20 years later and I'm seeing helpers everywhere now, too. Jesus is everywhere. Jesus is in the compassionate persistence of those who are healthy continuing to stay home so that the vulnerable are better protected. Jesus is on the phone calling this person and that person to check in and make sure all is okay. Jesus is showing up at the grocery store when someone gets one (not two!) packages of toilet paper when it is miraculously in stock. Jesus shows up as medical personnel, emergency workers, postal carriers, grocery deliverers, and hospital chaplains. Jesus appears as the creative, compassionate, endurance-filled school teachers who are coaching up and supporting parents as well as their students during distance learning, and as all those who are ensuring that the children of our communities have food to eat while school is out.

And Jesus is appearing in the technology that is facilitating communication and the building of relationships, as well as allowing us to worship together despite our intentional distancing. Jesus is in the buckets overflowing with food and diapers out in the front of church every week. Jesus is everywhere. Jesus is even there during our sleepless nights as we long for our loved ones to be safe and healthy.

Thomas' eyes don't perceive him. His soul is so distraught that he needs to know that God gets it, that God understands what he's feeling and thinking and how upside-down he feels his world is. So for Thomas, he'll believe Jesus is present if he can see the scars ~ evidence of the life he lived and the death he died.

And then, there he is. He comes among them again and says, "peace be with you." Jesus goes on to tell Thomas, "Put your finger here. See my hands. Put your hand here in my side. It's me. I'm here. I've not abandoned you. Even when you can't see me, I am still with you."

My friends – the ones who were furloughed – found their mailbox full of toilet paper last week. A day later, a box of groceries appeared on their back doorstep. Their church was able to help with the prescription co-pay costs. Jesus is showing up ~ in the form of neighbors and friends and their church community.

Like Thomas, it's important to me to know that God bears scars. That God engages with us so completely as to be willing to be affected by humanity. That, for me, is evidence of a perfect God: a God who knows what it's like to stay up all night longing for things to be different and at the same time trusting that things will work out in the end. A God that will enter the closed off rooms of our hearts where we hide when we're confused and hurt and anxious to gently remind

us that we're not alone and that we are loved. A God who gives us the gift of courage to step out in faith to do the next right thing, equipped with everything we need. A God who demonstrates for us that our wounds do not diminish us, but allow us opportunity to live into our wholeness. A God who transforms isolation and tragedy into invitations to connect and rebuild in new, creative ways. A God who gently reminds Thomas and the rest of us, that scars are evidence of life lived.

Life was different after 9-11: as a country, we came together and made some important changes ~ and day by day, we found a new normal, and our country was stronger for it. Life will be different after Covid-19. Around the world, we are coming together to do what we can to protect the vulnerable and working toward a common goal. Day by day we will find a new normal, and I pray all of humanity will be better for the lessons of compassion, patience, self-sacrifice, and cooperation we are learning.

In the meantime, we are called to continue Christ's work in the world ~ to say what he said, to heal as he healed, to live as he lived. And we, like the disciples, are to share Jesus' message "peace be with you" as we seek creative ways to serve and heal the world in the name of Christ, doing the next right thing ~ showing forth in our lives what we profess by our faith.

This is hard. And right now, for many of us, it feels interminable. But just like the first disciples who received the gift of the Holy Spirit, we too have been equipped with everything we need to live and love as Jesus did.

Bearing with courage the scars we've accumulated from our lived experience, made whole by the grace of God, we are the Body of Christ ~ loving and serving the Lord so that all who do not see may believe.

May the peace of the Lord be always with you.