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Hutterthal Mennonite Church

John 20:19-31

11 April 2021

Jesus Came

Hutterthal Mennonite Church, good morning! And good morning to all of you who are live-streaming our zoom service from our church website. As we pray for one in our church family who is in the hospital, and we attempt to worship together virtually, yet still separated by distance, we are overwhelmed by the reality that we worship in limited forms this morning. However, we earnestly await a soon-coming day when normalcy returns. The days are surely coming... the here, but not yet of today. The here, but not yet of renewal and resurrection.

Let us pray. God who visits us and moves in us, we thank you for your personal and powerful presence in our lives. We thank you that you are intimately familiar with each one of us, knowing deeply who we are, what we think, how we respond, and why we do what we do. Give eyes to see and ears to hear when you come to us like you came to visit the disciples the evening of Easter Sunday. Jesus, we hope in the power of resurrection, and we look to you seated at God's right hand, asking that the Holy Spirit would comfort us and embolden us to tell about how you have saved us and transformed us into who you have created us to be. Give us insight and discernment as we walk in your life and hope. In Jesus's name, we pray. Amen.

Jesus is risen. Mary Magdalene saw him in the garden after Peter and John left the empty tomb and the garden to return to the disciples, uncertain of what an empty tomb could mean. The angels told Mary that he had risen, and then he spoke to her. At first, she thought it was the gardener, maybe even the culprit who had taken Jesus's body, but when he said her name, she

knew that he was Jesus. Can we really believe her story? Couldn't the Romans have taken Jesus's body or maybe the servants of the high priest? Maybe she was mistaken about the gardener. Either way, someone is going to come looking for us, wondering if we stole Jesus's body, and what are we going to tell them? We'll lock the doors and wait for all of this to die down. Otherwise, we will end up like Jesus did... dead... humiliated...alone...

And then Jesus appeared. We couldn't believe it. The holes in his hands and his side. He spoke to us: peace and forgiveness, the Holy Spirit and sending. Yes, but Thomas wasn't there. What is he going to say when he gets back? None of us believed Mary when she told us, so how are we supposed to tell him now that we have seen Jesus? Jesus came alive. Jesus came to us.

John's Easter Sunday narrative includes the story above and last week's, in which Mary, the first apostle to the apostles or the first evangelist, tells the disciples that she has seen Jesus alive. The disciples then later that day in the evening experience the resurrected Jesus, not a ghost or an angry deity, but their teacher and friend in the flesh who had been crucified only a few days earlier. Their whole world was turned upside-down in that moment as they rejoiced. Mary was right. They have seen the Lord too. Just as the disciples did not believe Mary, so Thomas does not believe the witness of his friends. And just like Jesus came to visit Mary in the garden and the other disciples in the house, so Jesus comes to visit Thomas with the other disciples again on Resurrection Sunday, a week later. Thomas will not have it. Any other explanation is more plausible than resurrection, but then he saw him, the holes in his hands and side, his voice speaking to him again as Jesus had for three years as they wandered around Galilee. Thomas would never forget that voice. "My Lord and my God." What other response could Thomas bring to the true Messiah, the son of God? Jesus is risen.

In our winter, now turning into spring Bible Study on Wednesday evenings, I have asked participants to read pieces of scripture aloud to our virtual gathering and add a few short comments about what they notice from the passage. I love the different ways that we all listen to scripture as well as all of the ways that scripture then gives insight and wisdom to our particular experiences. When I read this passage in John chapter 20, I immediately notice the phrase, *Jesus came and stood among them*, which occurs in verses 19 and 26. Even the disciples who had seen and talked to and listened to and touched Jesus could not make sense of all that had happened thus far, nor could they make sense of Mary Magdalene's story of resurrection or of seeing Jesus. That is, until Jesus came. They were overwhelmed with all that had happened, all of the circumstances that had led up to their current predicament, that is being the followers of a crucified Jewish leader whose body had now disappeared. But what brought meaning and hope and peace and life and joy in the midst of great grief and confusion up to this moment was that Jesus came. Jesus came, and the whole story, their long journey with him, started to make more sense. Jesus came, and they rejoiced in resurrection. Jesus came, and their entire outlook and story changed. Jesus came, and they would never be the same again.

Have you ever had this kind of experience? Do you remember a time in your life when Jesus came? Maybe it was an overwhelmingly difficult moment when Jesus came in a powerful way to bring you peace and comfort. Like the disciples heard in the passage above 3 times from Jesus, you needed to hear Jesus say, "Peace be with you." Or maybe it was a life-changing moment when you realized that you needed Jesus to turn your life around, and Jesus came to visit you. Or maybe Jesus came to you when you least expected it, turning your whole world upside down with a new outlook or a different perspective on life. Or maybe Jesus came in the presence of the Holy Spirit, which inspired you and energized you to witness to how Jesus had

changed your life and transformed you into a different person. I don't know what exactly your story is or when Jesus has come into your life and changed you, but I know that all of us who claim to follow Jesus have been visited by Jesus. Jesus has come, is coming, and will come to each of us because God desires deep and true relationship with each one of us.

This morning, I have asked some members of our church community to share those moments that come to mind in their lives when they really noticed that Jesus came, when they were deeply aware of the presence of Jesus in their lives.

Thank you, the three of you, for your powerful witness as to the presence of Jesus in your lives. I welcome anyone else who has a story to call, text, email, or visit me in my office to tell me how Jesus came into your life like Jesus came into Mary and the disciples' lives. We testify to the ways that Jesus has saved and transformed us, drawing us out of destructive ways of living and being into the Kingdom of God that was established in Jesus's death and resurrection. We live in resurrected and renewed life because Jesus came.

Let us pray! God of deep and abiding presence, thank you for the ways the Jesus has come and visited us through the power and love of the Holy Spirit. Thank you that you never give up on us or let us go. Thank you that we are never the same after we encounter the resurrected Jesus, who will go through locked doors and find those in hiding in order bring them out into the light to witness to the ways that our lives have been transformed in the power of resurrection. Sustain us in your hope and peace. In Jesus's name. Amen.