

I belong to a couple of different online groups whose members are mostly preachers. The conversations in these groups are often a resource I use as I get ready to lead worship and preach each week.

A lot of the conversation this last week has in some way been around the question “now what?” Quite a few of us have decided to go off the narrative lectionary and focus on Jesus’ resurrection appearances as a way to approach the now what.

The cessation of gatherings – during Lent of all times – triggered a frenzy of activity amongst worship leaders. We were set on a steep learning curve to figure out how to continue our life of faith together without physical gatherings.

We’ve learned Zoom, Facebook Live and YouTube Live. We’ve learned how to make recordings of live worship and post them to You Tube.

We’ve learned there’s not an easy way to do both Zoom and Facebook Live at the same time.

We’ve added mute and unmute to our liturgical language.

Bigger churches were often already doing something online and had staff people to help, although this has been a challenge for all church leaders, no matter what the size of church.

Many churches were more like ours – a solo pastor with no online worship experience, no professional equipment and no IT or AV staff having conversations and email exchanges with colleagues and the tech savvy people in our congregations.

I’d never heard of Zoom before this, but thankfully, there were people in the congregations who had used it. Different church leaders shared tutorials on You Tube and gradually we’ve learned how to do this.

Pastors have worked to put mailings together for the offline community and made phone calls to help stay connected.

Holy Week is always the peak work week for pastors and church leaders. This year was doubly so. Everything took longer...have I made sure everyone has the meeting id and password? Did I remember to post the info on our Facebook page? Should I put it on my personal page? How many times do I send emails before everyone just gets annoyed? Did I get the phone in instructions for offline people? Did I remember to record the video and upload? Did I update the church website with all the info people needed?

Which services should I Zoom and which would be better for Facebook Live? And oh yeah, have you heard about Zoom-bombing, and now you have to use a password?

Every year the week after Easter is a little bit of a let-down. I've learned to not even try to work the Monday after Easter. Even in normal years, after pouring heart and soul into Lent and Holy Week, that "now what" sense is strong.

But this year it's in a league of its own...truly, after all the drama of the last month and the elevated sense of urgency to figure out how to do this, now what?

How long will we be able to keep this together online? What creative ideas should come next? Should online worship continue as an option even after we're back together? Or, maybe we're just all tapped out.

Now what?

Jesus' disciples were very likely asking that same question – now what? They'd spent three years learning at Jesus' feet. They'd seen Jesus heal and cast out demons and declare forgiveness of sin. They'd even healed some people and cast out demons themselves. They'd challenged the religious status quo.

In those heady early days, they were sure they knew the answer to now what. Jesus was the Messiah...things were going to change...for the better. How could it be otherwise?

But in those early days after the awful Friday, what they were sure was next...wasn't.

They were huddled in a locked room, fearful not only for their lives but for the possibility Jesus' promises were a sham. They were uncertain what to do with this report that Jesus was raised. They still had no idea what was next.

Now what? What do I do when everything I was so sure of turns out not to be?

We are living these days in a perpetual now what.

Each day we wake to "now what?" What will the case numbers be? How long will this last? Will someone I love get sick from this? Will I? Will I keep my job? Will my kids get through this online learning without losing ground? How will I live with my income reduced? Will my business make it?

How will I get through another lonely day without seeing family or friends? When will I see them again?

The disciples sat in that upper room, frightened, uncertain, baffled and heart-broken wondering, now what?

And it's right into that tormented now what that Jesus walks. The disciples fear doesn't stop Jesus from entering. The disciples self-isolation doesn't stop Jesus. Not even the locked door stops Jesus.

Jesus stops at nothing to get to his friends...and to bring them peace. To bring them, not certainty about the future, but certainty about Jesus. Jesus was still who they believed he was and Jesus still wanted to bring them the peace that only he could give.

For whatever reason, Thomas wasn't there. He missed out. But Jesus didn't say, you snooze you lose. He came a second time...for Thomas. To give the same peace and reassurance that the other disciples got.

Jesus does the same for us. We sit with our own frightened, anxious, angry, sad, and bored now whats? And into those, Jesus walks. Jesus will stop at nothing...not isolation...not quarantine...not even hospitalization...nothing will stand between us and the presence of Jesus and his peace.

What he won't do is wave a wand and fix all this. He reassures us of his presence...he assures us that he is the lord and savior of all creation...he assures us that his promise of peace is sure.

But it's a peace in the midst of everything rather than the peace of an immediate solution.

And lest you feel your faith flagging a bit as this goes on, remember Thomas. Even after the excited report of the disciples, Thomas still wasn't sure. So Jesus returned a second time, just for Thomas.

Although we don't know when Jesus will return physically, we do know that the same Holy Spirit breathed into the sagging spirits of the disciples is being breathed into us.

Christ's peace is there to wash over us every day as we face the uncertainty of the future.

Maybe as a way to navigate this, we can be awake and look for signs of Christ's presence. In the words of Barbara Brown Taylor, we have to be detectives of the divine...people who are able to look at the ordinary and extra-ordinary things going on around us today...and see the presence of God.

It's not easy. When fear or frustration or whatever emotion you most struggle with takes over, we struggle to see God at all. But if we use eyes shaped by the cross and resurrection of Christ, we will begin to see him everywhere...in the hope of small acts of kindness...in the willingness

of people to put aside their own self-interest for the sake of another...in every recovery from illness...and even for every promise of resurrection in death.

When we look, we see Jesus everywhere, coming to us, not with an easy answer to Now what, but with a reassurance that his promise holds true.

The witness of Mary and the witness of the disciples speaks across the millennia to us...We have seen the Lord!

Faith tells us, in the midst of the anxiety and uncertainty of the present days, so will you.