Sometimes, I think it’s easy to forget what’s really important. Sometimes, I think it’s easy to forget how important we are to each other. Sometimes, I think it’s easy to forget what’s real.

A few weeks before the stay-at-home order, I was walking to a meeting when I found a really pretty rock. I don’t know why it appealed to me. It’s not particularly shiny or unique or anything. I just liked its shape I guess. So, I picked it up and stuck it in my pocket.

Well, these Covid days I have found myself taking lots of walks. It’s one way I have found to try to deal with what’s happening right now. On those walks, I stick my hand in my pocket, and I find that rock.

I guess I have a pet rock now? I don’t know. There’s just something about holding that rock that grounds me and connects me to what’s real, to what’s really important, and to the reality of my connection to the universe, even if my physical daily surroundings have become rather limited.

I imagine Jesus’ disciples needed something to ground them after his crucifixion too. They had gathered to be together in their grief and their fear. Then beyond all their expectations the risen Christ appears to them in that locked room in the flesh. He appears to them there where they are, awash in their grief. He breathes on them and speaks to them. “Peace be with you,” he says.

In this unreal moment, he reminds them of what’s real. He reminds them what’s important. He reminds them of their unbreakable connection to him and to the peace he brings.

I often connect the idea of peace with the idea of healing. But this story reminds me that healing is a messy endeavor. One of the upsides of this terrible global crisis seems to be that as humans restrict our movement the overall Earth is getting a chance to heal. The Himalayan mountains are visible today from cities in India where they have been obscured by air pollution for decades. The water in the water-bound city of Venice, Italy is clear far beyond any recent memory. Here in Chicagoland, traffic is lighter, and if your lungs are telling you the air quality outside is improving, you may not be imagining it.

These are hopeful signs in the midst of a bleak time. Yet, as we approach Earth Day, this April, I am reminded that these signs also reveal how much trouble we residents of Earth are really in beyond this pandemic in terms of the deterioration of our global home. That problem was with us before the pandemic and it will remain after the pandemic has passed over.
The same is true with staggering national and global economic inequality. Perhaps you have even found that the same is true in your own personal life, as I have. In fact, what I have found is that some of my own personal struggles and tendencies for ill health I had before the crisis are only amplified now, and given the situation it seems almost impossible for me to hide those struggles!

I don’t know about you but the revealing of my struggles to myself and others leaves me feeling tender and vulnerable. Truth be told, that makes me uncomfortable. But then I remember, it’s okay. Because the risen Christ has holes too.

In the scripture story it’s not just a vision his disciples have in that room. It’s not just a feeling. It’s not even a zoom call. It’s the risen Christ appearing to them in the flesh. He has holes. He’s a real body. In the Luke version of this story, he’s even hungry. He asks them for something to eat.

In the version from John, he apparently has marks of nails in his hands and a hole in his side from where the Roman soldier’s sword pierced him. Even in his resurrected form, the risen Christ’s body is not without holes. Maybe that’s because healing really is a messy process. Real peace doesn’t come without working through conflict. And, the kind of power that moves the universe, transforms, and heals us doesn’t tend to look like the power presidents, multi-national corporations, or even truth-claiming religious leaders try to wield.

That power, according to the gospels, tends to look like an unwed teenage mother, a child with a few loaves and fish, and a hole-ridden, hungry teacher all revealing the unassuming, unexpected, life-saving, justice-bringing, healing, and transforming, glory of God.

I, for one, can’t blame Thomas for finding it hard to believe in that kind of power. I can’t blame him for forgetting what’s real, what’s important, and what connects us all. He can’t believe the stories his friends tell him. He has to put his finger in the holes to remember. And I can’t blame him.

You know, we have a wide range of understandings of the resurrection within our faith community and watching this video. Some of us believe in a bodily resurrection. Some of us are not so sure. Some of us are pretty sure that’s not quite right--maybe to say the least. Whatever we believe, I want to remind us that what we believe is real, important, and at its best, connects us all to each other, the earth, and all we hold holy.

I want to say, don’t be afraid to put your fingers in the holes. Don’t be afraid to feel what hurts. Don’t be afraid to remind yourself why we’re doing what we’re doing.

Some of us are out there putting ourselves at risk in the healthcare system or the goods delivery systems. Some of us are trying to work or learn from home. Some of us have lost our sources of income. Some of us are isolated from anyone else. Some of us are
with family and crushing in on top of each other in ways we maybe didn’t always have to be before. Most if not all of us are dealing with some form of worry or grief.

I’m no policy maker. I’m not in charge of much beyond my family and the ways I serve with you in this church. But when I get really upset and frustrated, I have found it helps me to remember why we’re doing what we’re doing. It helps me to remember that what we’re trying to do, imperfectly as ever, is save lives. I remind myself, we’re taking these drastic measures, working, risking, isolating, or waiting together to keep from completely crushing our healthcare system and to avoid the worst possible projections for loss of life.

I think one way to think about it is that together, we are doing our best to be the resurrected body of Christ. We are doing our best to testify to the unstoppable power of love, hope, and healing that I believe are holy gifts from God. I believe our life-saving connection to God, however we define that, is real and important, especially when the days before us may be full of challenge.

Listen, you don’t have to get a pet rock. But maybe when it warms up, you take a page out of Thomas’s book and touch something real. As the days warm, maybe you will want to get out and touch the warming earth with your bare feet until you remember. Remember what’s important. Remember what’s real. Remember our connection to each other, to the Earth, and to our eternal God. That is my prayer for each of us today.

May it be so. Amen.