

SERMON FOR APRIL 7TH 2013 JOHN 20

The Gospel lesson from John on this second Sunday of the Easter season describes what happens during the evening of the same day of Jesus' resurrection. Last week, Easter Sunday, we heard about the empty tomb and Mary Magdalene weeping outside the tomb, mistaking Jesus for a gardener until he spoke her name and she recognized him. Jesus then told Mary to go and tell the disciples what she saw and she went to the disciples and said, "I have seen the lord."

Several hours later on that same day the disciples are gathered behind locked doors huddled together feeling far from secure. John tells us they locked the doors because they were afraid.

But what the disciples did not realize was that they were behind a bolted door that would not keep the risen Jesus out and suddenly there he was standing among them speaking the words, "peace be with you."

Not long before Jesus was put to death on the cross he said these words to his disciples:

"I have said these things while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who the father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. And now I have told you this before it occurs so that when it does occur, you may believe."

And now, on this third day after the crucifixion, Jesus is standing among his disciples in that upper room with a proclamation that the peace promised for them in the days of his ministry prior to his death has been fulfilled.

This greeting Jesus utters "peace be with you" was the customary greeting of that time and place, but when Jesus said those very words to his disciples that night he had more in mind by far

than simply a cordial greeting. What he meant was peace in their own hearts and souls – true peace no matter what they would have to endure.

In addition to those words of Jesus, Peace be with you, on that third night in that upper room, Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit right into those disciples. This takes us back to the moment of creation itself that we hear about in Genesis when God breathed into Adam the breath of life and humankind was created. Now on the evening of this new creations first day, another breath of God has come forth.

A new breath to restore life and to undo the effects of sin and rebellion.

A new breath to create new life. The effect of which is a peace that enables the disciples to pronounce in God’s name the message of forgiveness and love.

But one of the disciples, Thomas, was not with the disciples that night and when they told him they had seen the Lord, Thomas responded by saying:

“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” This notion of needing to see it to believe it is not uncommon.

People over the centuries have desired that there be proof that God exists.

Many of us at many times in our lives want proof, just as Thomas wanted proof, but the kind of proof we tend to want, scientific or philosophical proof to demonstrate once and for all that God exists, would not in the end answer the depths of our true desires and needs.

That is why Jesus says: “Blessed are those who do not see yet have come to believe.”

It is not physical proof that matters so much– it is instead the peace that comes with knowing that Jesus is right here in our midst walking with us through life’s joys and struggles each and every day, and knowing that even if we doubt or fear or go astray Jesus will not abandon

us. That no matter what, Jesus will come into our own deadlocked places again and again with a renewed gift of peace and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

A point to take away from the gospel lesson we heard this morning is how Jesus responds to the doubt, not simply the fact that Thomas doubts. Jesus comes through that locked door to meet the disciples that night. Jesus comes back to that room a second time with a renewed gift of peace and offers Thomas a chance to see and touch his wounds. Jesus offers himself over and over and over again.

Yes indeed, the Easter miracle of this story that continues way beyond Easter Sunday is the fact that Jesus comes to us in the midst of our messy lives and allows us to recognize god in the every day.

We recognize Christ, in the moments when peace comes over us at times when we feel so bogged down we cannot go on . We recognize God when in the midst of violence and hardship and suffering, we realize we are not alone. We recognize Jesus in that still small voice calling our name when we begin to venture down the wrong path. We recognize Him when we sit down at the table and break bread together, whether it be at our own kitchen table, at a table in the homeless shelter, or at this very table right here.

And finally, when we do indeed recognize God in our midst how do we respond? Thomas' response is something to think about. "My lord and My God" he says. Thomas is the first person to look at Jesus and address him as God. Yet this is exactly what John has been working toward since the very beginning when he starts his gospel with In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God. In the end, John brings us around to where he started with Thomas' breath-taking statement of new found faith. Jesus, My Lord and My God.

And with that, Thomas and the rest of the disciples can no longer hide behind closed doors locked tight. Jesus sends them into the world, just as God sent Jesus himself. Peace be with you, Jesus says.. As the father has sent me, now I send you.

And this is exactly what Jesus is saying to each one of us. God is calling each and every one of us to let go of our own fear and doubt and to move beyond our deadlocked places and in some way shape or form – by the power of the Holy Spirit – bring to this world the forgiving transforming love that Christ continually brings to us.

The Easter story is real, not simply in the amazing celebrations of last week but as it unfolds in the lives of ordinary people. People like John and Peter and Thomas and Mary Magdalene and you and me. And knowing that Jesus will come to us showing us his wounds, offering himself over and over again calling each of us by name, brings a peace that passes all understanding and gives us strength and courage. May we be bold enough to undo the deadlocks that prevent us from doing what God is calling each of us to do and go as Easter people proclaiming to all the glorious news of our Christ who is risen who is risen indeed.