

Easter was just a week ago. If we were in church today we might look around and wonder where all the people who were here last week have gone. Would that were the case! The Sunday after Easter is notorious for low attendance but it's still Easter. It's still Easter for another 50 days! As our Godly Play lesson says, Easter is so important that we can't confine it to just one Sunday. We continue to celebrate Easter for 50 days. This year it's particularly important when we are faced with social distancing and isolation, challenges in trying to work from home, especially for those who have children, concerns about finances for those who have been furloughed or are working reduced hours, and fear, fear of a potentially deadly virus. Try using "Christ is risen" as a mantra whenever things become overwhelming. The powers of sin and death have been defeated. Trust in him. Trust in Jesus is at the core of our gospel reading for today.

Recently I saw something on the internet that said "Fear does not stop death, it stops life. And worrying does not take away tomorrow's troubles, it takes away today's peace" that seems to apply to our circumstances as well as the disciples. But people are people and we worry. Even for those who knew Jesus the good news of his resurrection took a while to sink in. Why wouldn't it? Nobody had any experience with resurrection. In the gospel of John the disciples had seen Lazarus brought back to life but he had not been resurrected, he looked just like he had in life and he would die again.

Mary didn't recognize Jesus at first, she mistook him for the gardener ... and neither did his disciples. Apparently they didn't believe Mary Magdalene, or Peter and the beloved disciple so they weren't prepared when he showed up in their locked room. This week's gospel lesson recounts the second and third of Jesus' resurrection appearances.

When the lesson begins it is the evening of the resurrection. The disciples have barricaded themselves in a room and are frightened. Suddenly Jesus appears. He says to them "Peace be with you" Then he shows them his hands and side (20:20). That's when they recognize him and rejoice. Then he says "Peace be with you" again and commissions them. "Just as the Father has sent me, so I send you." (20:22) what did Jesus mean when he said "Peace"? We can be sure that Jesus' peace is not a blessing for a comfortable life. It was the kind of peace that would enable the disciples to continue the work that Jesus' Father had sent him to do. It was the kind of peace that would enable them to face death, knowing that fear does not stop death. Following Jesus would be costly, like Matthew and Luke having Jesus say to lose life is to find life, in John's gospel Jesus says "Those who love their life lose it; and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. But Jesus does not send his disciples without support; his gift to them is the Holy Spirit "[who] will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you." Jesus breathes on them the same way God breathed into the first man (Gen 2:7) giving them new life in him as a new creation. This is John's Pentecost, this is when Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to the believing community to carry on his work of inviting people to see him and hear him as the Son of God, to trust in him. This message for John's community is also a message for us; Jesus is revealed to the world when the members of the community love each other and demonstrate the love of God in Christ.

A week later Thomas joins the disciples in that room and the disciples tell him that they have seen the Lord. However Thomas does not believe the disciples any more than the disciples

believed Mary Magdalene. Nevertheless in each case, Mary Magdalene at the tomb when Jesus calls to her, the disciples the week before when he shows them his hand and his side, and now Thomas a week later, wanting to touch those wounds Jesus gives people what they need to believe. It's no wonder that Thomas wasn't quite convinced by the reports of his fellow disciples and we shouldn't really begrudge him his need for proof. Jesus certainly doesn't. In fact Jesus does invite Thomas to touch his wounds. We don't know if Thomas took Jesus up on his offer or if the offer was enough to convince him. I suspect that Jesus' words were enough. Even so for Thomas, the disciples gathered in the upper room, for Mary Magdalene, and all the rest the questions uppermost must have been "He is risen...What happens now?"

Obviously Jesus had changed; he could appear and disappear at will. He wasn't a ghost, his corporeality was tangible. He would eventually join Peter on the beach for a breakfast of grilled fish. Although Jesus was back among them he had also made it clear that he wasn't going to stick around; things were not going to go back to the way they had been before his crucifixion.

So what happened next? The disciples were galvanized. Exactly when they found their moxie depends on who you read. Mark's gospel ends with the women running away and not telling anyone (which obviously they did); Matthew's gospel ends with the command to go out and make disciples of all the nations; Luke's gospel ends with the Ascension and Jesus' instructions to wait for the Holy Spirit; and John's gospel ends Jesus telling Peter about his eventual martyrdom.

But exactly when doesn't matter because they were, galvanized that is. That terrified bunch of disciples soon found a way to branch out and to spread the word. Some stayed in Jerusalem and some traveled. Wherever they went those disciples founded communities of believers: Tradition says that Thomas went to India; Mark went to Egypt, Philip to North Africa, Bartholomew went to Armenia, and Andrew to Russia. Paul himself gets clobbered and has his own experience of the living Christ becomes an unstoppable force in bringing the good news to Rome and he was planning a trip to Spain before he was arrested. So the disciples went and did and became and those who followed them went and did and became and here we are. Faith in Jesus is not about believing a set of facts about what he was and the history of his time on earth, faith is trusting in the relationship that the disciples had with Jesus and the relationship that Jesus has with God; that faith that has been passed down to us. Jesus is still speaking to us, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (20:29) John wrote those words for his community more than a generation after Jesus' death and resurrection. But those words are for us too.

We have to work a bit harder now because 2,000 years have elapsed since Jesus walked as a human being on this earth. At this particular moment it may seem even more difficult because the primary sign, the sacrament of Holy Communion is not available to us. For many people it is in receiving the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ that they feel closest to Jesus, it is the prayers of the Great Thanksgiving that we offer as a community that helps us to feel united as the Body of Christ. I know some folks don't even come to church when it is "just" Morning Prayer". Nevertheless we would do well to pay attention the conclusion of our gospel lesson "But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the

Son of God and that through believing you may have life in his name. (20:31) Holy scripture is the word of God and words, the power of the word is important. Scripture lives and breathes. In the absence of the Eucharist we still have the Word. Read it, reflect on it, embrace it. It is through the Word that we come to believe without having seen. Jesus is the Word of God. Trust in him. John's gospel begins with these words "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (1:1)

Amen