



The Reverend Anthony Estes, Associate Rector
The Second Sunday of Easter
April 11, 2021

Readings: Acts 4:32-35; 1 John 1:1-2.2
Psalm 133
Gospel: John 20:19-31

I remember when I was a child...my mother telling me that God's creation and power were so awesome that she had seen where it was raining on one side of the street, and it was sunny on the other.

And I remember, as a child, just being *amazed* by that.

And as an adult, I know that she may have been telling me about more than just the weather. It seems like she was giving me a metaphor for life: That for some people on some days, it's raining on one side of the street...while sunny on the other side.

And I have this memory, while thinking about the Gospel lesson for this week.

Our Bible tells us that after Jesus was crucified and risen, after Mary Magdalene and Peter and The Beloved Disciple had seen the empty tomb, after Jesus appears to Mary (but not to Peter and this Beloved Disciple...they've gone home)...that on that *very* evening they are gathered together in a house...locked up.

And I wonder what it was like being there — alone with their fears and personal failures — during the last hours of Jesus' life?

There they are. Jesus' body is gone. And the same powers that colluded to have him killed are still out there.

And then there is the fact that while they're locked up, the streets are filled with the faithful who have come from everywhere to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Passover.

It's rainy on one side of the street...while it's sunny on the other.

What was it like to hear the muffled merrymaking going on just outside of the doors of the house...that was in mourning?

I remember very early in my ministry going to the hospital and watching a priest plan the funeral of a terminally ill man. And I remember walking outside of the hospital, stunned and just thinking, *“How could people be happy and walking their dogs in front of a building where people were receiving the worst news of their life?”*

Yes, it is Spring. And the weather is getting nicer.

But for some of us who have reasons to be afraid, it just seems rainy. And we won't go out...for fear of being drenched in other people's merriment.

But it was in the tension of this mourning, the tension of this type of quarantine, that Jesus appears. And the words that he said to his disciples, including the incredulous Thomas, are the same words that I believe the Holy Ghost would have us hear — personally and corporately —today.

The first words that he says are, *“Peace. Peace to you.”*

Peace, not war.

Peace, not anxiety

Peace, not judgment or anger with yourself or for anyone else, for that matter.

Peace, not self-pity or self-loathing.

Peace, the *end* of hostilities with yourself, with God and even the people who have deeply wounded you.

Jesus, when he said these words to Peter who denied him, to Thomas who doubted him, and to the others who left him, Jesus is saying to them that he has not come with words of accusation or judgment. He comes to bring peace.

Peace to their troubled hearts and wearied spirits.

Peace in the midst of their fear of reprisal...

Because they are following the now risen-from-the-dead enemy of the state.

“Shalom,” Biblical Hebrew's equivalent to our English word “Peace,” means sense of wholeness and restoration and well-being.

In other words, what you may have been doing to yourselves or feeling...Jesus Christ, for them and for us, says, *“Be made whole and be restored and be at peace.”*

And then he says to them and says to us, *“Receive the Holy Ghost.”*

He breathes on them.

He commissions them to continue his work.

He breathes on us.

He commissions them that, as they spread the Good News, they are going to have to declare the forgiveness of sins to others...to know that if people did not accept their Good News, that those sins would not be forgiven.

We too are charged and empowered to spread the news of the resurrected Jesus, so that people can know *true* peace...and forgiveness of their sins.

And that It is only through *accepting* Jesus' resurrection that that true and everlasting peace can be known.

And to the disciples...and to Thomas who likely voiced the doubts of all of the disciples...he offered his own body, his own scars, as the answers to their lingering questions.

Jesus was *not* an imposter.
Jesus was and is, in fact, *alive*.

He understood their pain and their questions. And he did not ask them to believe, as one preacher said, contrary to their reason but *above* their reason.

Jesus asks us to believe, not contrary to reason...but to believe and not allow reason to stop us from wholly relying on Jesus for salvation.

Jesus knows their questions.
He answers ours.
He blessed them in their doubt and blesses us in ours.

He knows that we have questions about faith and existence and grief.

And when he answers his own question, with the gift of his own presence, the gift of his peace, the only question that remains is, "*What are we going to do in response?*"

And that is the question that John leaves us with.

You see, some of us might be reading from different translations — some from the New Revised Standard Edition, and others from the New International Edition and some from the King James Version - they word the 31st verse differently. Either your Bible will say that the things written in the Book of John were written so that people might *believe* that Jesus is the Christ or they might *continue* to believe that Jesus is the Christ.

And I can't answer which was in the most accurate. I can only tell you that there is ample evidence to support either reading.

What I can tell you is this: Whether you are coming to faith the first time or you are coming to faith for the 50th time, Jesus Christ is alive.

And if you can believe in him.
If you can find the reason to hope.
If you can find the strength to believe.
If you can find the reason to know that the rainy day can come to an end ...then you can have peace and wholeness and life in his name.

AMEN.