

Weekend of Sunday, April 19, 2020
2nd Sunday of Easter/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year A
First Reading: Acts 2:14a, 22-32
Second Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9
Gospel Reading: John 20:19-31
Sermon Title: “Peace Be With You”

Theme

The risen Jesus appears to his disciples, offering them a benediction, a commission, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. But one of their number is missing, and his unbelief prompts another visit from the Lord.

Text

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “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.”

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” ²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But 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.

Sermon

He is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

I hope you all had a wonderful Easter celebration even though it was not all it could have been. Even during a "stay at home order," Easter is still the greatest celebration in human history. Our Lord Jesus Christ has defeated sin and death and opened for us the gate to eternal life, closed by sin, and that is always worth celebrating!

OK, so honestly, this week was the first time I looked ahead at the readings for the next several weeks, and it looks like this week and next we will be continuing our "Journey with Jesus Through John." I am happy about that. I've enjoyed it, and I hope you have too. And then in May, the readings will jump around a bit. So let's get to this week's reading.

I believe that this Gospel Reading was destined for us this morning. Yes, I know that it is always the reading for the Second Sunday of Easter, Year A. But I think it speaks to our present situation. See if you don't agree.

As you will recall, on that first Easter morning, it was Mary Magdalene who was the first witness to the empty tomb. Not knowing what to make of this, she presumed that the body of Jesus had been taken. She ran back and reported this to the Disciples, and it was Peter and John who ran to the tomb to verify what Mary had told them.

Having seen the empty tomb with their own eyes, *they went home*. Oh John, does mention that he believed but believed *what* is unclear. And an issue that John does not bring up but that was sure to be a reality is that there was a real concern that the Jews and the Romans might be out looking for them, the remaining disciples, to round them up and put an end to the Jesus movement once and for all.

Meanwhile, despondent Mary lingered in the Garden, and that is where she encountered Jesus, becoming the first eye-witness to the Risen Lord. He told her to go tell the Disciples, so she ran back to Jerusalem and found them cowering behind a locked door. I just imagine her bursting into the room and shouting excitedly, "I have seen the Lord!" And that is where the Gospel Reading ended last weekend.

This weekend's Gospel Reading picks up there. The setting is the Sunday evening of Easter and John set the stage for us. He didn't say how the Disciples responded to Mary's announcement, but what John did write is that ^{19b}"the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews."

And that is when it happened. ^{19c}"Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you.""

(Pause)

Now let's review because we need to understand the setting here. On Friday evening,

- Jesus told them in cryptic terms they did not understand, that he was leaving them,
- and that one of them will betray him,
- And another would deny knowing him,
- and the rest will abandon him.
- They indignantly denied that they could do that.
- They would stick with him no matter what.
- Then one of them, Judas, did, leave the dinner and betray him.
- He led them to the Garden where the rest would abandon him just when things began to get difficult.
- And yes, one of them, Peter, denied knowing him.
- As they watched from a safe distance, they witnessed his beaten body and mockery of a trial and did nothing to prevent it.

Of course, it could be argued, 'what could *they* have done?' But remember that at the present moment, they were cowering in a locked and shuttered room together, fearing retaliation from the Jews, Jesus just showed up!

- Was he mad about all that stuff that they said they would never do, and did?
- Was he mad because in his greatest hour of need, they abandoned him?
- What does it mean that he appeared there among them, without anyone opening the door?

Again, ^{19c}"Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.

Twice in that first tense encounter, what Jesus wanted them to have was peace. He didn't say these words, but allow me to put words in his mouth. "Brothers, everything is fine. I know that there was nothing you could have done. Everything happened just as the Father willed it to. And now, as you can see from my hands and feet and side, although I indeed was crucified and died, I have risen from the dead. Peace be with you."

(Pause)

There is other good stuff in this lection:

He breathed on them and gave them the Holy Spirit, but we have 50 days in the future to celebrate that.

And there is the stubborn confusion of Thomas who was not present this time to see the risen Lord with his own eyes. We usually have fun at his expense, but who could blame him for not believing without seeing?

And in that next encounter with the Disciples when Thomas *was* present, Jesus told Thomas the same words he told the others, "Peace be with you."

Three times in this lection Jesus brought peace to their insecure reality, and it could not have come at a better time in their lives.

Isn't that just like our Jesus?

When the going gets tough is when we need to stop what we are doing and slow ourselves down and remember this story. Jesus Christ is alive, he has risen from the dead, and now he lives. He is on the job, bringing peace to all who will take what the peace he offers. Including us, in our present day.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

What I want us to remember this 2nd Sunday of Easter and this 4th week of the Stay At Home Order, is that no matter the situation we find ourselves in, John's Gospel, and all of scripture, reveals Jesus as a calming presence; a non-anxious presence. The one who calms the storms and uncertainties of life.

If he can show up behind shuttered doors and bring peace to the lives of his cowering Disciples, then he can bring peace to our lives in our present reality.

- God knows we are anxious about our present situation.
- God knows that some of us are running out of patience with our families.
- God knows that we need to interact; to work; to play with our family, friends, and mates.
- And God knows we need money to buy food and other life-sustaining supplies.

God revealed in Jesus Christ has a message for us. "Peace be with you." "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe."

"I know about your situation and I got this. Be patient and believe. Peace be with you."

Prayer

Lord God, we can certainly relate to this story. We confess that we are uncertain about our present reality. But on this day, being reminded of your Son and Our Lord's instructions to us, help us to believe in him and receive the peace that he alone offers. We pray this in his name. Amen