

Year A Second Sunday of Easter Peace Be With You John 20 vv19 to 31

We are a community – a loving and generous community of faith. We care for each other, we nourish each other but, we also reach out to others beyond this community. We reach out to others with the ministry of care, the ministry of generosity, the ministry of food, of learning, of music. Why? Why do we do that? Is it simply because we're nice people? We *are* nice...but, there is more to it than that.

As the curtain parts and the lights come up on our gospel scene today, we see a community of faith...a bedraggled, despairing, terrified community of faith. The disciples, huddled in fear, eyes swollen from tears and bleary from lack of sleep, huge, dark circles underneath, ears straining for the first tell-tale thud of a soldier's heavy tread...When the leader is arrested and killed, the followers are next. But, they hear... nothing...nothing but the thud of their own beating hearts against the background static of the occasional stifled sob. Exhausted and hopeless, John lets his eyelids close...just for a moment, he thinks. A startled gasp jolts him upright and his eyes pop open to behold Jesus. Jesus is there...somehow...in that locked room. Suddenly, there is a clamour of noise as the disciples, excited and confused, gather around and try to ask Jesus questions all at the same time and Jesus quiets them... "Peace be with you," he says. Peace be with you.

Peace...Not the "peace and quiet" after a busy day...Not the eerie peace that falls when the fighting has stopped...*God's* peace. It is the peace beyond our understanding. It is the quietness of spirit that transcends the circumstances. It is the peace that brothers and sisters exchange with one another before they break

the bread and share the cup. It is the peace that only the risen Christ, standing in our midst, can give because this is the peace born of right relationship with God. Being in right relationship with God means that we love God but it also means that we love ourselves, it means that we love others, and it means that we love the whole of God's creation. God's desire – and God yearns for us to desire this too – God's desire is to reconcile all things to Himself and to each other. God's peace. The peace the disciples were given.

“Peace be with you,” Jesus says to them and then he gives them an astounding, priceless gift. In the moment of their grief and hopelessness, when they were painfully aware of Jesus' absence, suddenly he was there breathing his presence into them...breathing the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The same breath that moved over the waters and created this beautiful world out of chaos, light out of darkness. The same breath that breathed life into the dust God had shaped into Adam. *That* breath breathed life into the disciples. *That* breath brought light into their darkness. That breath made them into a new creation and like Adam, made them stewards of the world. That breath gave them the gift of Jesus' presence always, even unto the end of the age. And that breath, gave them God's peace.

It is the same peace that Jesus brought once again a week later...this time to Thomas. Peace be with you, Thomas...the one who needs to see my scars to believe. Christ's glorious resurrected body, the body that would never again die, still bore the scars of his death on the cross...An everlasting witness to the salvation God gave to us when we were still sinners. When Thomas saw those scars he did *more* than believe his master was standing in front of him...Thomas

fell down on his knees and worshipped because he knew *God* was standing before him. God with the scars of suffering. Christ's body, scarred for us.

And here we are...Christ's body here on earth...We certainly have scars – scars left by hurtful words, scars left by broken relationships, scars from financial troubles, health issues, arguments. We are all scarred in some way. Then, we look out the window at Christ's body, the earth, and it doesn't take long to see the scars there as well. Huge swaths of land destroyed by raging forest fires, the local landfill site heaped high with garbage, a continent's worth of plastic floating in the ocean, hungry, hopeless people lined up outside the food bank...We are broken and scarred. Our world is broken and scarred.

Yet, like Christ's broken body, resurrected through the power of the Holy Spirit, scars and all, never to die again so, too, will we be resurrected and, so too, will God resurrect this broken world, scars and all, never to die again. Why? Because God so loved the world...We have hope. We are ever straining toward the peace of God. God's peace that will be everlasting and complete when all things are reconciled to each other and to God.

"Peace be with you," Jesus said to his disciples and he breathed into them the gift of his presence, the Holy Spirit, and he sent them out – just as the Father had sent him – to spread that peace, the good news of salvation through what God had accomplished in Christ. And that hopeless, terrified, small little community of faith became the confident community of faith witnessing to a risen Jesus of Nazareth - a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you. And that small little community of faith became the communities of faith spread throughout the Middle East and Asia,

became the communities of faith spread throughout the world, became the community of faith that you are today.

“Community of faith” is a description that does not quite say all it needs to say. It doesn’t fully get to the heart of who we are together. We are not just a community, not just a group of people who come together to worship or to fundraise or to share fellowship. The Spirit who breathed life into creation, the Spirit who was breathed into the disciples, is the Spirit who dwells within each one of us through baptism...different individual person – same unifying Spirit. We are, each of us, connected together, joined together in a deeply intimate, profound way that transcends time and place. It is a bond among us that cannot be broken by distance or even death. Bound together by the Spirit, one body of Christ, that same Jesus Christ breathes on us the responsibility of this priceless gift. As my Father sent me, so now I send you. God’s purpose is the ultimate reconciliation of all creation to God and to each other. We are, each one of us, ministers of reconciliation, revealing God’s kingdom through living the way of God’s kingdom. It is not enough that we worship together. That is extremely important – crucial in our ongoing transformation – but not the whole of our purpose. God’s purpose will never be fulfilled without us bringing it outside these walls. “God’s kingdom come, God’s will be done on earth as in heaven” must be more than prayed. It must be lived.

We are the new generation of believers that we first see in this Gospel story. The disciples saw and believed. Without Jesus’ physical presence on earth, faith comes from hearing and believing. John very clearly sets that before us. “Blessed

are those,” Jesus declares. In other words, “Adored by God are those who have not seen and have come to believe.”

In believing, we have life in his name, John tells us. Life that comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit...life given to the dry bones of those who had turned from God in Ezekiel’s vision. Life given to the lepers, the blind, the oppressed, the outcast...life that is not just living but being truly alive, living in community – truly alive in the love and peace that passes all understanding breathed into us by Jesus.

Thomas saw the scars of his broken Lord and knew he was looking at the power of God’s limitless love to call forth life from the worst death-dealing wounds sin could inflict. As we look at the wounds sin has inflicted on creation, on the vulnerable around the globe, and even in our own lives, we act in the confidence that the One who breathes into us his Spirit continues to call forth life from death. Indeed, we are sent forth as a living testimony to such resurrection life.

Says the risen Lord who stands among us even now, “Peace be with you.”