

The Second Sunday of Easter - Year B  
April 19, 2009  
The Reverend Mary Lee Bergeron

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## “The Resurrected Jesus”

*God of hope before us, God of healing within us,  
God of mercy above us, Come be with us. Amen*

Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

In today's Gospel we hear about the disciples, especially about their fears. They are still in shock about the crucifixion. They think the authorities might be after them so they find a place to hide. The New Testament Scholar N.T. Wright suggests that they are back in the upper room. They lock themselves in. They need time to think, time to get a plan. What's next? They had left their families and jobs to follow Jesus – to be his disciples. Now he is gone. What will they do?

There are rumors about an empty tomb; Mary Magdalene said she had actually seen Jesus!! While the disciples sit together they share their confusion. They all feel saddened, fearful, and lonely. They stand and sit close. They need each other.

Then the unexpected happens! Jesus stands in their midst! Right in the middle of their fears and sorrow! How did he get in through locked doors? Yet they all know this is Jesus – no doubts! Before they can say anything Jesus looks at them and says these words; “Peace be with you” ..and he shows them his hands and his side. They are overwhelmed...this is truly the resurrected Jesus.

A Lutheran pastor Frank Honeycult writes about his reflection of this scene. He says, “there is something important going on here that connects the peace of Christ with the wounds of Christ. Pastor Honeycult asks what might happen if we follow the example of Christ when we pass the peace. For example, say ‘Peace be with you Betty and by way please look at the scar from my elbow surgery’; or ‘Peace be with you Jack; did you know about my nephew who is struggling with drug addiction, please pray for him’; Well, you get the idea.

I read that reflection recently. What came back to me full force was an image of this last Wednesday during the healing service. We had followed the service and were ready for the peace. So I said, ‘The Peace of the Lord be with you – and they replied, and also with you.’”

What happened next was amazing. Almost everyone came out of their pews into the center aisle to pass the peace. They were talking and laughing and sharing – yes, it was like a post resurrection sharing. I passed the peace with few people up front and then we walked to the center toward the group. What I heard and saw was a community of people glad to see each other, to share a service and to share their own stories. It's wonderful to see you, "Tell me how you are?" Almost like, please touch my hands and my side. We were together. Jesus was with us then as Jesus is with us today, saying to us then and now, "Do not be afraid to share your wounds and joys with each other."

That's what happens as soon as the disciples know Jesus is with them – they relax. They are back together. All is well.

Jesus says, "Peace be with you! (he pauses, and then adds these words!) As the Father has sent me, so I send you!" while the disciples are trying to grasp these words, Jesus stops, breathes on each of them. He follows the breath with these powerful challenging words, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

The disciples are overwhelmed by those words. Jesus is back so why does he want us to do all this. They, like us, are processing these words, you see as baptized Christians we are followers of Christ and so those words speak to us also.

Actually, on their own, just hearing those words, the disciples don't have what it takes to follow the commission to forgive sins. But that breath? That breath, the breath of the Holy Spirit, the breath is what empowers them to do the things that sounded impossible. In Genesis we learn that God breathed into the figure of Adam to give life, so here the Gospel of John tells us that Jesus breathed into the disciples, not simply for life and energy, but to receive the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God to abide with them forever.

We all want the kind of empowerment that helps us in the time of turmoil. Sam J. Ervin, Jr the late U.S. Senator from N. C. says it this way; "Religious faith is not a storm cellar to which men and women can flee for refuge from the storms of life. It is, instead, an inner spiritual strength which enables them to face those storms with hope and serenity.

To find that kind of strength we must take our own spiritual experiences, our own lives seriously; to share our experiences and hear the stories of others in our community. This is a way to continue to learn what it means to be a Christian; what it means to be sent and what it means to forgive and to forget.

In the book *Memories of God*, Roberta Bondi, a Prof. of Church History at Chandler School of Theology talks about the resurrection in terms of her own experiences, especially some related to depression that started in her childhood.

She describes a moment in which her understanding went through a deep transformation. She was alone in her study and in a moment of despair she said to herself, "I absolutely give up." She surrendered to her state of mind. She said, "There in my familiar chair, on that April afternoon, the light of my life went out..How long I sat there in that state, I have no idea. Perhaps it was a long time that passed; perhaps it was simply a moment. I only know that, all of a sudden and without any warning, I woke up. I heard my own voice repeating in my mind the words from the Roman Catholic Eucharistic prayers for Easter, 'The joy of the Resurrection renews the whole world.' Every cell of my body heard them and for the first time I knew that these words were absolutely true."

Roberta Bondi repeated "'...the joy of the Resurrection,' and she said "my heart filled up with a joy so fierce that it spilled out and ran through the whole of my body and flickered around me like a flame. I laughed out loud for pleasure...Of course! There was, indeed, something I had missed about Christianity, and now all of a sudden I could see what it was. It was the Resurrection! How could I have been a church historian and a person of prayer who loved God and still not known that the most fundamental Christian reality is not the suffering of the cross but the life it brings? Of course, Jesus did not die to bring death to the world, but to establish life God gives us not death, but joy." This experience gave her new life!

Even Thomas the disciple who missed seeing Jesus when he appeared to the other disciples; even Thomas who we call the pessimist or the doubter; even his needs are met. Jesus returns to see him; says, "Peace be with you." He seeks him out and guides Thomas's hands to feel his wounds. As Thomas touches Jesus, Thomas is being touched by the spirit to believe and say, "My Lord and my God." Thomas says it for all of us, who have heard the words, "Peace be with you", and through Holy Week and through our own experiences felt the wounds. We can say because of the testimonies of the disciples and especially Thomas, "My Lord and my God.

Gracious and Holy God, empower us with your Holy Spirit. *Amen*