

Second Sunday of Easter

April 11, 2021

Sermon by Rev. Zachary W. Johnson

Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church
Pasadena, California

Gospel: John 20:19-31

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 by Pastor Zach Johnson

Even though Mary had rushed back from the empty tomb to tell the disciples that she had seen the Lord, risen from the dead, and even though both Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved had seen with their own eyes that indeed the tomb was empty, we find out from our gospel reading this morning that the disciples huddled together in a locked room for fear of being persecuted. And yet, God's word needed to be proclaimed. For the people of the world to believe without seeing, they needed to know the story of Jesus' death and resurrection.



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And so, Jesus appeared to the disciples, not allowing locked doors or fear to hinder him. Jesus appeared to the disciples and eased their fears by saying to them, “peace be with you.” Then, to make sure they knew it was really Jesus, resurrected from death, Jesus showed the disciples his hands and his side. Now, they too have seen the Lord.

Then, as Jesus promised on their last night together before he was crucified, Jesus breathed his spirit upon the disciples so that they would now have the power to proclaim the good news to the world. This was the Holy Spirit that was breathed upon them. It is only with the power of the Holy Spirit that the disciples finally understood all that Jesus had said to them; had taught them; the signs that he had shown them. Now, they could share the story so that the Holy Spirit would stir the hearts of others to abide in Jesus.

However, as we continue on in the gospel story this morning, we find out that the community of the disciples is incomplete. When Jesus appeared, everyone but Thomas was present. And even though the disciples found Thomas, after Jesus had appeared to them, and told him that they too have seen the Lord, Thomas’ response was that of longing; he wanted to be included in the community; he too wanted to see the Lord. Because Thomas felt excluded, the faith community of the disciples was lacking in wholeness.

We know this to be true because, instead of having gone out into the world to proclaim the good news, we discover that a week later the disciples are once again behind a locked door. But, again, the power of God’s word must be proclaimed. So, once again, Jesus appears to the disciples. This time, Jesus directs his attention to Thomas and invites him back into the community by having Thomas touch Jesus’ scarred hands and side. As Thomas touches Jesus, he is the first of the disciples to proclaim, “My Lord and my God!” The faith community of the disciples is once again of one heart and soul.

Our gospel story this morning conveys to us two important things for us. The first is that God’s word needs to be proclaimed. The good news of the resurrection does not end on Easter Sunday. The good news of the resurrection does not stay within the confines of this building, or this faith community. If we think that we can hide behind locked doors keeping our belief in Jesus to ourselves, well then guess what? Jesus isn’t going to be hindered by locked doors; he will walk right through them in order to breathe the Spirit on us and get us out into the world in order to share the good news with others.

Even if our locked door is the fact that we don’t think our words are elegant enough to proclaim the good news, Jesus will walk right through that door and give us the Spirit who will guide our mouths to speak the words that proclaim Christ’s resurrection to others. Even if our



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locked door is the fact that we feel too broken and we've convinced ourselves that Jesus would never love us and therefore exclude us from the faith community, Jesus will walk right through that door and breathe his Spirit upon us to remind us that we have forever been claimed as God's beloved and there is nothing in this world that will ever change that fact. Even if our locked door is the fact that we feel we don't have the skills or abilities necessary to go out into the world in order to proclaim the good news, Jesus will walk right through that door and breathe the Spirit upon us so that we are reminded that we have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and we can use those gifts to proclaim Christ's resurrection. No matter if our locked doors are due to our age, our fears, our time, our energy levels, our families, or anything else that we think might hinder us from going out into the world to proclaim the good news, Jesus will walk through any and all locked doors in order to breathe the Spirit upon us and lead us back out into the world to proclaim Christ's resurrection.

The other thing our gospel story tells us is to ask the question: who needs to be invited into the faith community in order for us to be of one heart and soul together? Who is missing from our community that needs to see and touch the Lord? God created the world to be rich with its diversity. We, as the church, need to reflect that diversity. Like Jesus, we have been given the power to invite others to see and touch Jesus, so that they will proclaim on their lips, "My Lord and my God!"

Thankfully we live in one of the most diversely populated areas in the entire world! We don't have to travel very far in order to invite others who are different from us. But, also, inviting people to come to worship will give them the opportunity to see and touch Jesus. It is in our worship that we see and touch Jesus through word and sacrament. After all, through the proclamation of the word, Jesus appears to us in the burning of our hearts that is filled with Easter joy. Jesus is also made known to us in the breaking of the bread, which is where we touch the presence of Christ as the body of Christ is placed in our hands during Holy Communion.

In order for our faith community to be truly one in heart and soul, we are empowered by Jesus to go out and proclaim the good news, inviting the rich diversity of people out there to come and see the Lord. In doing so we will all come to experience the amazing grace and love that we mutually share with God the creator, Jesus the Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.



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