

April 27, 2025
The Second Sunday of Easter, Year C
Trinity, St. Louis
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

Acts 5:27-32

Psalm 150

Revelation 1:4-8

John 20:19-31

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The most important thing I must tell you today is this, "keep on feasting!" As parties go, New Year's Eve and Mardi Gras have nothing on the Great Fifty Days of Easter. From now through Pentecost on June 8th, it's all Easter, all the time. Just think! 50 days to remind ourselves what Jesus told Martha: *I am Resurrection and I am Life*; 50 days to remember that love casts out fear; 50 days to remember that death tramples down death; 50 days of practicing resurrection. 50 days to keep on feasting.

On this second Sunday of Easter, we always hear the same reading from St. John, no matter the year of the lectionary cycle. It's a gospel story, a good news story, a story of how life looks after the resurrection of Jesus.

When we listen to the story, it's easy to fixate on just how Jesus got into the room through that locked door. It would make a perfect episode of one of those "Mysteries of the Bible" shows where they claim to have discovered a long-hidden equivalent of a transporter..."Beam me up, Peter."

And, when we grow weary of that, we spend our time throwing shade on Thomas, labeling him as a stubborn silly. I mean, why wasn't he there in the first place? So, are these our only options for today – to talk about the Door or to talk about the Doubter? What about the disciples? The other disciples?

What's going on in that Upper Room? It's now Sunday evening, the evening of the first Easter. The disciples and their company have gathered – that sounds a bit polite – they had FLED from Jesus' side and are now cowering in this room, with the doors barred and locked. The text tells us that it was for fear "of the Jews," that is to say the religious authorities, but I think it's sufficient to say that it was for fear, period.

Try to imagine how they must have felt that night. The world as they knew it had ended. Their beloved leader had been executed, and now his body was missing. The core of their being had been snatched away.

Nobody in this crowd was saying *keep on feasting*. Instead, it's as though the disciples had voluntarily entombed themselves – in parallel to Jesus. The difference, of

course, is that Jesus submitted to entombment out of love. The disciples sign up for entombment out of fear. They are overwhelmed with everything that has happened.

All of us have had experiences that overwhelm us. To be sure, change is about the only thing we can count on in life. But there are changes that are unexpected.

There's macro stuff like pandemics, war, and political violence. Then there's the stuff that's closer to home. Your boss calls you in, or you get an email, telling you that you no longer have a job. Your doctor says, "well..." One morning, the person you love wakes you up saying, "this isn't working."

Overwhelmed. It seems like such a simple word for that awful sense of being engulfed with loss, grief, fear, and shame – all of which lead to paralysis.

So, on that Sunday evening, we have a room full of Jesus' paralyzed followers, when suddenly there he is – Jesus, standing in front of them. There's a lot of shuffling and staring at the floor. *Pause ...* What's going on in their heads and hearts? *Pause ...* Pretend we're inside a graphic novel, and fill in the speech balloons with me...

So, Mary and the other women WERE right! Don't you hate it when that happens? He is ALIVE and right here in front of us. Jeepers! We ran away – we're going to get it now! The plates of emotion begin to shift from slack-jawed amazement to wondering what Jesus has in store for those who fled; those who broke his heart.

Does Jesus remind Peter that he had been warned about denying him? Does Jesus fuss about who went where – between Gethsemane and the Tomb? Does Jesus scold anyone about anything at all? No. He simply says, *Peace be with you.*

Imagine for a moment what that must have felt like. Peace. And forgiveness. Jesus' gift of forgiveness allowed them to breathe. Really breathe.

Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams writes: "There is no hope of understanding the Resurrection outside the process of renewing humanity in forgiveness. We are all agreed that the empty tomb proves nothing. We need to add that no amount of apparitions, however well authenticated, would mean anything either, apart from the testimony of forgiven lives communicating forgiveness."¹

The resurrection is, in the first place, an experience of forgiveness ... for us. The disciples had abandoned Jesus, becoming complicit with his murderers. But they now stand forgiven. And at peace.

¹ Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002), p. 109.

The Gospel story this morning is St. John's version of the beginning of the Church. Not with tongues of fire or multiple languages – but with the giving of the Holy Spirit. Or, in another reading of the Greek – giving the breath that is holy.

Jesus breathes on them – as God breathed into to the first humans at creation. Jesus gives them a gift; and then gives them as a gift to the whole world. In one breath, on that very evening, the disciples get to start practicing resurrection. "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven."

*Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.*²

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Now enters Thomas. Thomas who is called Didymus, the Twin. Thomas who gets a bad rap, and we call Doubting. When the disciples had locked themselves in, Thomas was not there. Where he was, we can only guess. But he wasn't huddled in fear with the others.

Maybe he was running errands – to the bank or the post office. Maybe, just maybe he wasn't as fearful as the others. Or, maybe, his defiant declaration, "unless I put my finger in the mark of the nails ... I will not believe" served as a deflection of the pain of his loss.

A week later, they are in the locked room again. This time, Thomas is there. After saying, "peace be with you," Jesus encourages Thomas. "OK. Here you go, touch away" (*hold up hand*). And what happens? You may have seen paintings of this scene with Thomas probing one of the wounds, but that's not what's in the text. Instead, Thomas says, *My Lord and my God!* And, in that moment, Thomas, too, is forgiven.

Now, there are no more doors – and there are no more doubters. There are just disciples...who are given a mission, to make known God's new covenant of reconciliation. Jesus told them, "as the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Today, that "you" in the gospel text means you; it includes all of us...the ones we just sang about, we who "walk by faith, and not by sight."³

In last Sunday's New York Times, columnist David French wrote about two types of churches – the "fear the world" type and the "love your neighbor" type. I believe that Jesus' commission to the church, in all of its variations, calls us to a foundational, purposeful, posture in and toward the world. I believe that Jesus calls the

² Edwin Hatch, 1878.

³ Henry Alford, "We walk by faith, and not by sight." H-209.

church to see the world “not as a threat to be engaged, but as a community that we should love and serve.”⁴

The writer Parker Palmer reminds us that “the mission of the church is not to enlarge its membership, not to bring outsiders to accept its terms, but simply to love the world in every possible way – to love the world as God did and does.”⁵

Some days, especially these days, when the “fear the world” type of church is on the rise, just talking about resurrection, let alone practicing it, seems daunting. But let’s remember what happened in the Upper Room, at the birth of the church. Jesus gave no marching orders for control, or for domination, or for retribution and revenge.

What Jesus did to that night, at the very birth of the church, was to breathe on his disciples words of reconciliation, of peace, and of mission...to carry into the world those same words of reconciliation and peace.

Whenever you are afraid and hiding out, all locked up, God comes to you in the midst of your fear and says, “Peace be with you.” Whatever doubts churn in your mind, whatever sins trouble your conscience, whatever pain and worry bind you up, whatever wickedness in the world seems overwhelming, whatever walls you have put up or doors you have locked, God comes to you in great love and says, “Peace be with you.” In raising Jesus from the dead, God assures you that your own wounds are never the end of the story, even though the marks remain.

Whatever hunger and need you feel deep in your soul, God calls you to this table, to feast on bread and drink rich wine. Having fed you well, God sends you, with the Holy Spirit, out into the world to do the work God has given you to do – to love the world in every possible way. To witness to forgiveness, to work for justice and peace, to be signs of hope. To show forth in your life what you profess by your faith.

*Breathe on us, Breath of God, fill us with life anew,
that we may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.*

Into the midst of our fears, Jesus comes, saying. “Peace be with you.” Into the midst of our confusion, Jesus breathes the forgiveness of the Holy Spirit. Into the midst of our powerlessness, Jesus gives us (who have never seen, but believe) a mission – to be witnesses to the world of God’s new covenant of reconciliation, of God’s undying love. In the words of the Epistle, “God has given *us* a new birth into a living hope” (1 Peter 1:3), so keep practicing resurrection! Keep on feasting!

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen!

⁴ David French, New York Times, April 20, 2025, *Were You Raised in a Church That Fears the World or Loves Its Neighbors?*

⁵ Parker Palmer, *In the Company of Strangers* (1983).