

“May the words on our lips and  
the meditations of our hearts  
be acceptable and pleasing to you, O Lord.”  
AMEN!

It startles me when I sit to study and  
prepare for a sermon and find  
that the first reading is not from  
the Old Testament.

Normally, it is but for the Sunday's in Easter  
and including Pentecost  
the first reading is from the Book of Acts.

Whoever put together the lectionary  
(that is the assigned readings for each Sunday)  
may have intended to get our attention.

The resurrection of Jesus pretty  
much changed everything, right?

The Book of Acts tells exactly  
that story of what happened after  
Jesus ascended to heaven.

Acts tells us what the resurrection of  
Jesus makes possible.

The book is sometimes called  
the Acts of the Apostles, but it makes  
much more sense to call it  
the Acts of the Holy Spirit because

the apostles, without the Actions of  
the Holy Spirit would not have been able  
to accomplish so much of what they did.

With the Holy Spirit,  
the fledgling disciples matured and  
understood and then flew from their  
nests of hiding to soar to different  
places and proclaim Jesus Christ  
the Son of God.

They suddenly, and finally, realized what it was  
that Jesus had been sent to do,  
but it still was a tentative time.

They were still outnumbered and marginalized,  
they were still overpowered by  
political adversaries and  
challenged by deficiencies of wealth.

On one hand, they knew the Holy Spirit  
was with them but the influence of  
that same Spirit needed to be trusted  
to work in people around them whom

they might not expect.

One such person was the Levite Joseph  
who we are introduced to in Acts.

The Levites, in most cases in scripture,  
appear solely as priests who administer  
the divine law and assist in sacrifices.

During the years when Jesus walked the earth  
and about 40 years after,  
the Levites held positions of high status.

They were unlikely converts and  
I wonder if any of the disciples had considered  
the possibility that the Holy Spirit was at  
work in someone like Joseph the Levite?

We aren't told of any specifics of  
the background but simply read that  
this Joseph sold a field he owned and  
laid the money from the sale at  
the feet of the apostles to use  
as they needed.

The action was powerful enough,  
Holy Spirit driven enough that  
the apostles saw that Spirit had indeed  
been at work in Joseph and

changed his name to Barnabas.

He entered into the new community of Jesus followers.

Barnabas, son of encouragement,  
because his financial gift inspired growth  
to help the new community not starve and  
to give aid but also encouragement

that the Holy Spirit was at work in people  
they hadn't expected.

Who are the people in our life and day  
that we might not expect the  
Holy Spirit to be at work?

I can think of a few names of politicians or groups  
that profess division and outright lies.

What does it mean for us to consider  
that the Holy Spirit just may be at work in them?

At work in changing hearts, minds and  
wills to crack open a hardened heart and  
begin to move into compassion.

It is not an easy thing to do to consider  
that the Holy Spirit is working inside  
those with whom we disagree with.

But it is exactly what the resurrection of  
Jesus can make possible. (Pause)

The truth is, it is easy to get tied up  
with our gospel lesson today and  
find ourselves stuck in Thomas' doubt.

We naturally wonder if we doubt,  
or if it is ok to doubt, or why do we doubt,  
but we miss the real lesson if  
we stop at doubting Thomas. (Pause)

What revolves around the theme  
for today is that in John, Jesus appeared  
to Mary Magdalene first.

She didn't recognize him right away but later  
tries to hold onto Jesus  
calling him "Rabbouni!"  
(Which means teacher).

Mary Magdalene then went to deliver  
the witness and message to  
the other disciples.

We are correct to assume, I think,  
that the disciples did not believe  
Mary Magdalene because we find them

hiding behind locked doors and  
terrified when Jesus entered and said,  
“Peace be with you.”

Then showing them his hands and his side  
they rejoiced.

In that moment Jesus forgave them,  
breathed the Holy Spirit on them and  
sent them to forgive.

Everything today revolves around forgiveness.

The problem was that everyone  
was there except Thomas.

They all told Thomas what they’d witnessed,  
heard and experienced with Jesus  
but he had trouble believing them.

And a week passed.

The unwritten miracle might be that  
even in Thomas’ unbelief  
he remained part of their group.

They didn’t kick him out for missing  
the moment with Jesus.

They didn't berate him for  
not believing their witness.

You can say that they forgave Thomas but  
still knew that God's Holy Spirit was  
at work in him.

So, now they are all together and  
Jesus appeared again.

Jesus answers Thomas' need to know.

And then we are told of the intimate details of  
the way Jesus offered himself to Thomas in  
an amazing gesture of forgiveness. (Pause)

The theme for this 2nd Sunday of  
Easter is forgiveness.

Forgiveness is embedded in Jesus' final words  
from the cross, and in his appearance  
behind locked doors to  
“forgive the sins of any so that  
they are not retained.”

Then to Thomas for his unbelief.

Forgiveness is the hallmark of what it  
means to be a follower of Jesus and

forgiveness recognizes that the Holy Spirit  
is at work in people we often  
do not expect. (Pause)

A wise person once told me  
that forgiveness does not mean  
a person must not be put in jail.

There are certainly crimes that must  
result in a person being incarcerated and  
removed from interacting with  
a large population of people.

Forgiveness does not let people  
“off the hook” for unethical or hurtful behavior,  
instead forgiveness lets the one offended  
or hurt put down the burden of  
carrying the hate or  
feelings of revenge around.

It is also wise to know that forgiveness  
by fallible people is repetitious and almost  
never a one and done experience.

I watched an interview with a mother  
whose son was brutalized by police.

She realized quickly that she could  
not carry around the burden of what



that officer had done to her son and  
that the justice system  
let him off the hook.

There was no closure and no justice  
for the wrongful death of her son.

“I’d see him drive by in the squad car and  
felt the familiar feeling come back into me  
even after a year.

My friend,” she said, “came over to my home  
and gave me advice.”

She said, “I was punishing myself  
for the death of my child and that forgiveness  
did not mean I had to become friends  
with the policeman that killed him.”

“That hit home, for me,” she said.

“So I went home and pretended  
I was a priest in a confessional.  
I spoke out loud,

“Officer, in the name of God, I forgive you.”

It felt kind of foolish but my burden of hate  
and the torture of pain began to diminish.

The forgiveness I gave was the planting of  
an overwhelming sense of peace that  
was given to me. (Pause)

The Easter gift to us is to come and find  
what makes the resurrection of Jesus  
possible in our lives.

A generous gift inspired by the Holy Spirit  
to your community of faith or favorite charity?

A bold proclamation that Jesus is the  
Son of God when you listen to a person  
you love experience crisis?

Or an amazing act of forgiveness upon someone  
who has committed a trespass or hurt?  
Receive the Spirit and find that it turns out  
that the forgiveness we long for is conditional  
on our ability to forgive.

AMEN!