

It is the second Sunday of Easter - the second of seven (!) Sundays that are set aside by the church as the Season of Easter. But while it might be the second Sunday, our gospel reading is a story that takes place on the day we call Easter Sunday.

That day began in the dark, with Mary Magdalene going to the tomb and finding it empty. The story she tells that Jesus' body had been taken by someone puts emphasis on that darkness in which the story began: It's the darkness that keeps Mary from recognizing the risen Jesus when he approaches. It's a darkness in which death is the ultimate power in the universe, the ultimate truth that is the end. Jesus breaks Mary out of that darkness by calling her name.

That is the first appearance of the risen Christ in the Gospel of John. This Sunday, still Easter Sunday in our story, we receive the second. And it is evening. Darkness is descending. The locked doors of the house where we find the disciples (locked for fear of the religious authorities) mark this "evening darkness" as more than darkness. This too is a darkness in which death rules ultimately. Locked doors or not, though, Jesus "came and stood among them and said 'Peace be with you.'"

Jesus, in the flesh, stood among them. We read, “After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.” He showed them his scars. This is not a vision of Jesus. This is Jesus, once dead now risen (living!) with the marks of that death clearly visible; scars that make him recognizable as Jesus - their Jesus. For it is only when these marks are seen that “Then the disciples rejoiced”, Then “that they saw the Lord.” He’s got the scars. Jesus lives. He is risen.

But why? It’s a question that we ask a lot when we’re kids, and it’s a question that unfortunately seems to fall out of our vernacular as we age. Have you ever asked why the resurrection? It’s easy not to - it’s easy to assume that of course, this is how God saved the world. I think this Sunday’s story of Jesus’ second resurrection appearance answers why, at least in part and perhaps a little differently. This is what we’re looking at today. So back to the locked room - Jesus fully alive, standing among them.

This very physical appearance of Jesus amidst the fear and darkness in which the disciples are locked reminds us of something. It calls us back to a bigger picture: Jesus appearing in the darkness. The light in the darkness. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” We are cast back to some of the first words from this Gospel of John.

“In the beginning,” it opens, “was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things came into being through him... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth... No one has ever seen God,” we read. “It is God the only son... who has made God known.”

What we hear in this *Prologue* is an understanding of God that gives shape to every story this gospel tells, including the story of creation itself and our story today. We see it clearly, sprinkled throughout the text - maybe nowhere more clearly than in its most well known verse. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” This verse reveals that (for John) God’s intention in Jesus is relationship - relationship with all people and all of God’s creation (The World).

Keep this beloved verse in mind as we move forward.

Before we get to Thomas, the resurrected Jesus does something that rings again with the infancy of creation. Genesis 1, that we heard at the Easter Vigil one week ago from last night, begins (like John) “in the beginning”. But while John speaks of the Word, Genesis speaks of a “wind from God” that “swept over the face of the deep.” That Hebrew word for *wind* is Ruach - meaning wind, breath or Spirit.

To give the disciples this spirit my translation says that Jesus “breathed on them”. But Karoline Lewis translates it this way: “Jesus breathed *into* them”.

Skip ahead one chapter in Genesis where we read, “the Lord God formed [a human] from the dust of the ground, and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life; and the [human] became a living being.”

In this giving of the Holy Spirit to the disciples, John again invokes the creation of all things, and he does so because of what Jesus has done just before giving the Spirit: The resurrected Jesus tells them, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Jesus sends them as the Father first sent him, and for the same purpose: To make God known.

This is the mission of God - to make God known. This is the commission of the resurrected Jesus, given to his disciples - given to us. To this work he sends us. For this work he breathes into us the breath of life as at the dawn of creation making us a new creation. We are re-created in the presence of the risen Christ who stands among us, in the midst of despair, in the midst of darkness, in the midst of our rooms locked by fear. We (like the disciples) are re-created (all of us) in the image of Mary, the first witness of the resurrection, that our words echo hers; that “I have seen the Lord.” And made in her image, Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit, making this sending (our going and doing) possible.

And Thomas missed it! The disciples, made in the image of Mary, say to Thomas, “We have seen the Lord!” But in reply, “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.”

Beloved Messiah, we've got it all wrong. Doubt is not Thomas' problem. Belief is not what Thomas is missing. When Jesus died, the relationship between him and Thomas died. What Thomas missed and needed\* in order to believe was not simply proof that it was true - it was the reinstatement of that relationship that the resurrection might make possible. Thomas is clear that a vision of Jesus will not do: He needs the scars.

The healing of this relationship is what we see when the risen Christ comes to that room again, one week later. “Peace be with you,” he seems to say to Thomas. And addressing him directly, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.” This is intimate. This is Jesus, risen and seeking in vulnerability | reconnection. This is Jesus, bearing his scars for the sake of one's healing. Did it seem to Thomas that Jesus gave up too quickly when he was arrested? That he went too willingly to his death? Did Thomas in the end feel betrayed by his teacher and friend? We'll never know, for history has reduced him to doubter. But in the end, the relationship is healed and Thomas is transformed. In the presence of the risen Christ, he is re-created, proclaiming “My Lord and my God!”

Truly, the resurrection of Jesus and the accounts of his appearances seem fantastical. They can be hard to imagine. Believing them is one thing, but believing what they say is another thing altogether. That John describes believing as not ascribing to but belonging too (in relationship) makes the believing all the more possible, even easy. Because Jesus is seeking you out. If he missed you last week he's back again, looking you in the eye, offering you his scars, seeking your healing.

If that seems hard to believe let me ask you - who is Thomas' twin? It's never explained, but this is how John identifies him. The gospel writer allows these open identities in two places among the disciples, allowing us to identify ourselves in the gap.

So is Thomas your twin? If so, the risen Christ is coming to you too then - appearing in all the locked and shuttered places we find ourselves (we find each other), lighting up the darkness, giving you a gift that will sustain you on the way he sends you. So give way, my friends - give way to his return, his reaching out to you, scars for scars seeking your mending, speaking your sending.

AMEN

God loved the world, and sent Jesus to reveal that love that we might live new lives in loving relationship with God eternally.

Once the disciples recognize Jesus and rejoice, two really important things happen. First, he says again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” He sends the disciples, and “When he had said this, he breathed on them”, giving them the Holy Spirit.

But Thomas was not with them. Thomas did not see Jesus raised from the dead, he did not see the marks on his hands and side. Thomas did not receive the living breath of life from the risen Jesus. When the disciples echo Mary who first told them “I have seen the Lord”, Thomas says no: “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.” For these words, Thomas is named doubter forever.

We hear in John’s “Prologue” what this Gospel intends. It intends to make Jesus known, not by simply telling his story, but by leading us into relationship with him. That relationship is the shape John gives to his concept of belief. Believing in Jesus is not “intellectual ascent” in John - it’s not “understanding Jesus theologically” - it is being in relationship with Jesus.

We move on to the important pieces of this story we have today. But keep this story in the context of John’s gospel and how it begins. It will help us see our story more clearly.

Jesus, risen from the dead, suddenly appears, despite the locked doors, shuttered windows and darkening light, in the flesh - in his body - bearing the marks of his death. Jesus comes to give peace to these disciples. But the party doesn't last long - "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." This is an appearance with a purpose, and Jesus' purpose is to send these disciples out of that shuttered, locked room into the world. But he doesn't send them alone. "After he said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

This echoes the big context again, now beyond the Gospel of John all the way back to the creation of the original human in Genesis, where God "formed humankind from the dust of the ground and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living being." The "breathing on" in our gospel reading is just as accurate a translation as "breathing in" - Jesus breathed into them the breath of life. Karoline Lewis says this:

The connection between the creation of the first human being, that the earth creature became a living being because of God's very breath, and the giving of the Spirit to the disciples cannot be overstated. This resurrection appearance is a moment of re-creation, of new birth, of abundant life, of becoming children of God.

There's a lot there, but what I want to emphasize is that this story echoes the creation of the first human through breath. Jesus breathes into these disciples the breath of life, re-creating them. What is it they become? I'll come back to this.

But Thomas was not with them. Thomas did not see Jesus raised from the dead, he did not see the marks on his hands and side. Thomas did not receive the living breath of life from the risen Jesus. When the disciples echo Mary who first told them "I have seen the Lord", Thomas says no:



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Resurrection is about relationship - In the context of relationship that we are sent.

This is recreating. Making us witnesses.

Jesus Christ:

The faithful witness,  
first born of the dead,  
ruler of the kings of the earth,  
to him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood.

The door is locked - fear. Security for vulnerability. Shame?

Jesus comes right there

Jesus appears, stood among them - Peace be with you

They have yet to see him

He shows them his hands and his side. THEN they see the Lord

I send you.

He breathed on them “Receive the Holy Spirit” (to do with forgiveness?)

Thomas “the twin” - twin with who? Us.

The others tell him (echo Mary) “We have seen the Lord”

Practice for the disciples? Ripples outward (Mary, Disciples, Thomas)

Thomas is the first of us.

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

Week later - doors shut no longer locked.

Church?

Jesus sent them but Disciples are still there!?

Jesus came and stood among them: Peace be with you

To Thomas:

Put your finger here and see my hands

Script for Disciples

Reach out your hand and put it in my side

Do not doubt but believe.

Thomas says - my Lord and my God

Have you believed because you have seen me?

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

These are written so that you may come to believe... have life in his name.

You can't keep him out - Juel