

## Sermon Easter 2 Year C 2019

Well, what a marvellous celebration of Easter we've had together! And I thank all of you who were part of it and made the journey with us. We focus a lot of our energy and time towards making our celebrations reverent and beautiful and prayerful. And so, a number of us probably deserved a well-earned break after it all and have something of a quieter week this past week. I know I certainly tired to. The trouble is, Easter is not yet over!! Easter is not something we just observe for one day, give a huge sigh of relief that it's over, and get on with the rest of life. No. We extend our celebrations. We now find ourselves in the *season* of Eastertide. Today is the second Sunday *of* Easter. And that is because we need to *keep* reminding ourselves that we are an *Easter people*, that it is *Easter faith* that is at the heart of what we believe, that it is the events of Easter that show us what kind of God we believe in, it is Easter conviction that lay at the heart of our hope. So, whereas we observed 40 days of Lent, we now have 50 days of Eastertide. Alleluias ring out. The vestments remain white. The Paschal candle burns at every celebration during this season. We maintain our decorations for as long as we can. We start our Sunday Eucharist with the sprinkling rite so that we are reminded of the essential connection between Easter faith and baptismal faith.

During this Easter season we can think of ourselves as part of a great symphony. The readings and prayers and hymns for each Sunday between Easter and Pentecost invite us into a different 'movement' of the *one* great symphony of resurrection faith. Or we might think of this season as something like a drama that plays out over several weeks. And each part of the drama - each character, each act and each scene - uncovering further insights, pushing the story further along.

The gospel placed before us today is certainly critical to that unfolding story of resurrection faith. And like a drama, the story set before us unfolds in a number of scenes. The first scene in today's gospel has the disciples hiding behind closed doors "for fear" of those who had handed Jesus over to be executed by the Roman authorities. Jesus appears among them, offers a greeting of peace, and tells them that he has been sent by God, his "Father".

And breathing on them they receive from him the gift of the Holy Spirit. This breath of course points us to the spirit - the breath of God - that hovered over the waters at the dawn of creation. And it points us to the breath that God breathes into Adam to bring him to life. So, this act of Jesus breathing on his disciples is an act of *new-creation*. The disciples can leave behind them their *old life* of fear and uncertainty. And as his new creation, Christ in turn sends *them* out to bring peace and the forgiveness of God; for *them* to be agents of this new creation: *As the father sent me, so I send you.*

And as it is told us today, a central platform of Jesus' commission, his mandate to his disciples, is forgiveness. This, of course, was such a central part of Jesus own ministry. Almost every Sunday throughout Lent we heard of different ways of understanding God's forgiveness; his mercy, his patience, his calling us to change of heart, his calling us to repent, to turn to him. But now, in the light of the resurrection, the disciples are to be carriers, proclaimers, sharers of this good news of forgiveness: *for those whose sins you forgive they are forgiven. For those whose sins you retain, they are retained.* But Christ's commission also invites us to consider the consequences of forgiving on the one hand and of not forgiving on the other.

Now, in this post-resurrection context there is a lot to be forgiven: for abandoning Jesus; for denying him; for refusing to believe; for remaining shut up and behind closed doors; for choosing fear and withdrawal. There's truth here in the old saying: *you can't give what you don't have.* So, before the disciples can be agents of God's forgiving love, they need to know it for themselves. Before they can proclaim and share the new creation Christ's life-giving breath gives them, they need to allow it to take hold within themselves.

That the disciples *do* break out from behind those doors and *do* proclaim the new life Christ brings shows they *do* come to know themselves to be forgiven. They can promise and proclaim a new start for everyone because they knew it for themselves.

The second and third scenes in today's gospel focus on Thomas who was not with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared in their midst. The second scene sees Thomas rejoin the group, and the third Thomas is with the group '*eight days later*' when Jesus re-joins them. Thomas is not exactly the trusting type. He seems to trust only his own first-hand experience. He's a true materialist. If we think, however, that those who hear from the outset are any better than Thomas, we need to note that the doors are *still* closed eight days later! The simple fact of knowing has not dispelled their fears. It seems that even those who do believe and trust need a bit of time to take the good-news of the resurrection on board. That should encourage us to be patient with ourselves, and patient with those whom we love but are slow in believing.

Despite Thomas' slowness to believe, it is moving to see how Jesus meets and accepts Thomas just as he is. But it really just echoes that movement of forgiveness we saw earlier. The challenge Thomas made in the second scene (*unless I see the holes the nails made... unless I can put my hand into his side...*) Jesus accepts without complaint or criticism. He responds to Thomas' need even if it comes from a lack of trust. And just as Jesus breathed on the disciples - in a very real earthy and physical way - so he invites Thomas to touch his wounds in a very real, earthy physical way: *put your finger here... give me your hand...* It is the *breath* of Jesus and the *touch* of Jesus that inspires conversion and change of heart. And just as we are sent to share God's life-giving forgiveness, so too we are invited to touch the wounds of Christ. *Nothing* is to be kept away from Christ's healing, life-giving presence. And we know there is so much in our own lives, and in the life of the world around us, that needs Christ's healing, forgiving presence.

Easter faith is a celebration of the healing and forgiveness the risen Christ brings. During this holy season we celebrate not just Christ rising from the dead, but *our* rising as well: our leaving behind death and fear and guilt just as those first disciples had to leave behind their fear and guilt. Christian faith - Easter faith - is not a spectator sport. The great symphony of faith - the great drama of faith - will not permit us to be passive observers. Christ breathes on us so we may *share* his spirit. And he invites us to touch his wounds so we may be healed so to bring his healing to all places of hurt. Amen.