

**Second Sunday of Easter/April 7, 2013**

**John 20:19-31**

**Rev. Joel M. Krueger**

***"Peace Be With You"***

What makes for peace in the hearts of humans?

What object of faith gives the courage to overcome all uncertainty, fear, disillusionment?

On the evening of that first Easter day, the first day of the week, John tells us that the disciples were gathered behind closed doors, afraid that those, who just three days before had arrested and crucified their leader and teacher Jesus, might come looking for them. They were afraid! They were fearful. They were uncertain and confused about what they should do or where they should go.

That first Easter day was not a time of rejoicing and happiness according to John. It was a time of fear. And into that environment Mary Magdalene came and told a story about an empty tomb and a risen dead man. They thought she had gone off the deep end. Although Simon Peter, Jesus' right-hand man, and the young favorite of the master, the "beloved disciple" John, had both gone to the tomb as well and saw that the body was gone, confirmed at least part of her story. The experience did something to them, though at that time they were still in a fog, unclear as to what it was all about.

They were a bunch of traumatized individuals. Peter, still smarting from his trinity of denials of knowing Jesus. Mary, Jesus' mother, having just witnessed not only her son's death but the brutal tortured, bloody treatment of this one who was literally her own flesh and blood. The young John who at the foot of the cross had been suddenly given the enormous responsibility of caring for Jesus' mother. Mary Magdalene who knew him more intimately than all the rest trying to deal with the loss not only of her teacher, her "Rabboni" but one she deeply loved. All of them, women and men whose lives revolved completely around this one man for the past 2 or 3 years, now having all their hopes and dreams dashed to pieces within a matter of a few days, they were each a jumble of nerves, enveloped in a haze of confusion and depression, each simply a quivering psychological mess.

Into that sad, paralyzed group, Jesus appears. Yes, Jesus, the dead guy! He appears in the room. Was it a mass hallucination? Somebody dressing up like him and playing a trick on them? No, they knew this man, and this was him. They knew his presence.

And what does he say? *"Peace be with you."* He will say it twice, *"Peace be with you."* And he breathes on them, and they feel this weird kind of power come over them, John calls it the "Holy Spirit." And then, apparently, just as suddenly as he appeared, now he is gone. But they feel it, that peace he spoke of. That peace he gave to them, together, they feel it. And they are different.

Of course, someone had to miss it. Someone had to not be there. Isn't that the way it is? There's always someone who misses the start of the movie, someone who is always late for the surprise party, someone who is always showing up late and asking, "What did I miss?"

And that would be Thomas. Who knows why he wasn't there that evening? Maybe he needed to get out of that stuffy suffocating room full of death and depression. Maybe he needed a smoke or some food or a drink or he just needed to go for a walk, regardless of what danger may lurk outside their doors. Maybe he needed to pray. It doesn't matter though. What matters is that he wasn't there. And when he returned, that stuffy room wasn't stuffy anymore. Something had happened. Something had changed. They all were different, they were smiling, they were up and moving, caring for each other, they were all filled with some kind of joyous spirit and he hadn't the foggiest idea why?

So they told him what happened. They told him the impossible story that the dead man appeared in the room and had wished peace upon them. That he breathed on them and they breathed in his breath and were filled with that Holy Spirit, and it went right to their heads. No, no, actually it went right to their hearts and they were never going to be the same.

But Thomas, that was his nickname really, it means "the twin", who's twin we're not sure. Maybe Jesus' twin? Maybe your twin? Who knows? Anyway, Thomas couldn't take it all in. It was just too much to ask a man to believe. He needed some proof. He needed to experience it himself. He couldn't seem to breathe in that breath they all had breathed. It seemed to have all blown out the windows.

And a day went by, and he still couldn't believe. Another day, no change. Another day and he felt more and more alone, isolated from the others. They had seen the Lord! Why couldn't he have been there? Why did Jesus show up just when he had decided to leave? It wasn't his fault! He just wanted what everybody else got to have, a chance to see his teacher, his friend, his loved one. You can imagine the pain, the growing agony day by day, how much it would have eaten away at his insides to be separated from those around him, to be the only one, to be separated from Jesus.

A whole week went by and they were again in the house. Thomas had not gone away from the group that whole time. He was not going to miss anything if anything was again to ever happen. It was the first day of the week again, Sunday, one whole week after that first Easter morning. And Jesus appeared again. Like out of nowhere, he just appeared. He knew Thomas was waiting and he could pick him out of the crowd just like that - he was the one that still looked like a starving prisoner in his self-made cell. He showed himself to Thomas, lest he not truly believe it was him. And then he said it again, this was the third time, *"Peace be with you!"*

And Thomas got it! And right then and there he replied with those words that are the climax of John's gospel, those words of certainty and affirmation, that statement that said he too had breathed in the breath of Christ, *"My Lord and my God!"* Words that echoed the ancient Hebrew formula for the divine, *"Yahweh - Elohim"* and reached out to incorporate the Roman words that gave divine status to the emperors *"Dominus Deusque."* It was Thomas who named this one who was *"Lord and God"* for all people, whose breath and spirit was to enter each and every one of us, both those who had seen and those, who like Thomas and us, had not seen, but who could yet know and believe.

And it didn't end there. Thomas would go on to carry the gospel eastward, as far as India and possibly beyond, like so many of the disciples who went out, so that Christianity was proclaimed far beyond their homeland of Palestine and Galilee. It was in the community that they each found the power and the presence of the risen Christ and it is in the community where we too, regardless of our own troubles and fears, find Christ and hear his words spoken to us, "*Peace be with you!*" Amen.