

Reflection for Sunday April 11, 2021

The Second Sunday of Easter

I learned something that I probably knew at one time, but had not thought about for ages. The disciples were the people who were followers of Jesus, students of the teacher. However when Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit into them, they became apostles - those who are sent to take the news of Jesus' resurrection into the world.

In the Acts 4:32-35 passage, Luke says that the small community of believers is unified in "one heart and soul". They have the same purpose, mission and values. Their witness of the resurrection of the Lord, gave them a unity that was part of their mission and witness to the world. They were to become apostles now. Their new purpose was to take the news of the resurrection and the possibility of a new loving community that responds to what God is doing for them. They would share with all, just as others were sharing with them.

A great need of the present day church's worldwide mission is to recapture this unity in grace and witness. Another way to look at the church's mission is restoration for the people who have broken lives, to a new life in community. The sign of God's reign in Jesus' ministry was healing. The sign of God's reign in Acts is the creation of a new community where life for everyone is sustained. This is the new mission of the apostles - to take this news to the world. The source of this possibility of a new life in community is the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection is the demonstration of the power of God over all the powers of sin, death and destruction in the world. It is also the power to transform the lives of those who believe.

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In the John 20: 19-31 passage, we hear about Thomas. Almost everyone knows Thomas. Doubting Thomas as he is known by many. But Thomas is just like many of us. He is the typical nonbeliever who hides inside every believing Christian. The person who questions the easy answers, the one who has hard questions about faith, the one who always wants a little more proof. Most Christians experience different kinds of doubt at different times in their lives. During adolescence, young adulthood, middle age and older age, doubts happen. Some people leave the church community and come back years later. Especially when times are difficult, our faith can be strained. But the real story in this passage is not about who Thomas is, but about who Jesus is. When Thomas had his doubts, Jesus came to him. Jesus walked through a closed locked door to see Thomas. No one else seemed able to convince Thomas that Jesus was alive. Thomas needed proof. Jesus refused to let locked doors stop him from bringing love to the one who lacked faith. After Jesus says to Thomas "Peace be with you" and shows him the wounds on his body, Thomas believes.

Jesus breathed on the disciples the breath of the Holy Spirit, with the words "As the Father has sent me, so I send you". They are not only to proclaim the gospel, but also to grant forgiveness to those who

have sinned. Now they possess the Holy Spirit and they are to begin the work of Christ and the new church.

Jesus tells Thomas "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe". We all long to see, want to have proof. The proof of Christ alive is in the grace that God bestows on us, the love He shows us, the forgiveness He gives us again and again every time we forget His message of love. And every time our faith is lacking.

For us, God comes to us, wherever we may be. When we have doubts instead of hope, God will come to us, just as Jesus came to Thomas - even if we are disbelieving, even in our hardships, or when we are at the end of our rope, or on the far edge of faith, wherever we are - God will be there, bringing us love. Even when we are not seeking God, God will seek us and find us and give us love. Jesus spoke the simple words to Thomas "Peace be with you". Thomas needed to see the wounds of Jesus to believe. But he knew Jesus was there when he heard the words.

How do we recognize God? By experiencing any of the many gifts God gives to us. Love, faith, peace, joy, hope and many other blessings you can think of. When God comes to us, we recognize His presence in the moment when peace and love are offered to us. We realize that we are not alone.

And so the mission of the church is to take this message to others. Everyone in the community has a need and the church exists to help meet these needs. The work ahead of us is to think how the breath of Christ touches our lives and how we can share the news of the resurrection of Jesus with others.

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