

Sermon: Second Sunday of Easter April 27, 2025

Peace Lutheran Church, Danville Pr. Lucy Kolin, preacher

Texts: Acts 5:27-32, John 20:19-31

Peace and breath...in today's gospel those are the gifts Jesus gives to his disciples. "Peace be with you," was his greeting when he appeared to them. Now peace was in some ways **exactly** the greeting to give; it was what anyone with any manners said when they entered someone's house in that culture. On the other hand, peace was a most **unlikely** greeting. After all, what had happened three days earlier was anything **but** peaceful: Jesus' arrest and trial, torture, crucifixion and death. And all of this had had its effect on the disciples. We know this because when Jesus comes, he finds his disciples behind locked doors for fear of meeting a similar fate. In a way, it was a mini-version of the moment that preceded creation, the moment, according to Genesis, when the waters of chaos were still uncontained, the moment before turmoil and disarray were turned into divine order and peace.

Jesus said, "Peace be with you." As always, he took the initiative, showing his disciples who he was by the wounds in his hands and his side. Those wounds were, for them, the mark of continuity with the Jesus they had known, the one who taught and healed and died on a cross. **Without** the evidence of those wounds, it's clear they would not have known him, because he was changed somehow, even in appearance: clothed with power, it was impossible for even his closest friends to recognize him when he came. So there was good news in the wounds, the evidence that Jesus had accomplished his work and had been raised and now could share the power and blessing that were his to give.

"Peace be with you," Jesus said again, and, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." But **these** disciples didn't appear to be going anywhere...how **could** they, when they sat huddled in a locked room, a **tomb** of a room? That's when Jesus gave his **second** gift, the gift of breath. He breathed on his disciples, a very intimate act hardly recognizable as Pentecost for those of us used to the big and brassy Pentecost from Acts, so noisy, so fiery, so in your face and in the streets. But this is **John's** Pentecost, the only Pentecost these disciples could handle, the only Pentecost they needed.

And the breath...this breath wasn't just **any** breath. It was the breath named Holy Spirit. **This** breath was the same breath that swept over the face of the waters of chaos in the beginning. **This** breath was God's **own** breath,

powerful enough to transform fearful men and women into men and women of confident faith, invigorated for a life of witness...men and women who could live in peace even in the face of trouble and resistance and the threat of death...men and women who were grounded and planted in the victory and peace of Jesus' saving wounds.

Remember all the way back to Christmas Day, how we read from John's gospel **then, too**? On that day we read from the first chapter, the first verses: "In the beginning...", we read and were immediately drawn into the story of the first creation, when all things came into being. Now, in today's gospel reading, we come to chapter 20, to the point at which some say the gospel of John **originally** ended, and we hear the story of a **new** creation: how Jesus breathed the Spirit on his disciples so that they might have the faith and the power "to show the power of the resurrection in all that [they would] say and do. By that holy breath, by that Holy Spirit, by the newness of life that was born in those disciples, we recognize the God of creation as the God of resurrection – one and the same.

But there was a problem. Thomas didn't make it back for Jesus' appearance. And when he was told, "We have seen the Lord," he was unable to believe. He was in the same predicament, the same state of mind that his brothers and sisters had been before Jesus came to them on Easter evening. His faith was no better and no worse than theirs. He was not any more at peace than **they** had been. And he **said so**, adding his desire to see what they had seen, the wounds that would tell him that this **was indeed** Jesus, crucified and risen.

Jesus heard that prayer and came again to the disciples, this time when Thomas **was** present. Jesus came and stood among them, while the doors were still shut, and said, "Peace be with you." Then he offered his wounds to Thomas to see and to touch. Jesus **wanted** Thomas to believe, so he did not deny him. And Thomas **did** believe, confessing, "My Lord and my God!" In the beginning of John's gospel, in the very same place we found the story of creation, we **also** find **these** words, "The Word was with God and the Word **was** God." Now, at the end of the gospel, here in chapter 20, it is **Thomas** who is given the honor of concluding the gospel with his wholehearted confession. Now, the evangelist prays for **our** confession.

So he invites us to make **another** connection. Throughout his gospel we are always reminded that Thomas was called "the Twin." But we never meet Thomas' twin. I don't think it's an oversight on the part of the evangelist or an unimportant detail. I think it's because **we** are Thomas's twin sisters and

brothers. We share his longing to believe and his fear that such Good News couldn't be true. We, **too**, would see Jesus, crucified and risen, and know him by his wounds. If we could but do this, we say, we **too** could believe with confidence and share the Good News with conviction and joy...

which is exactly why Thomas has been given to us. He is **not** a bad example. He is **not** scolded by Jesus. He is our stand-in, our second, given the task of showing us that those who have **not** seen **can still believe** because of the testimony of those who have, because the story has been passed down in our families, in the household of the Church, and in every corner of the world. The Spirit has been breathed on countless men and women, girls and boys, and so the witness goes on. As the last verse of today's reading declares:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Yes, Jesus, crucified and risen, **continues** to appear in the world, continues to be active and visible in the world, because of people like Thomas, whom legend has it traveled to India to deliver the Good News, and because of people like Peter, a traitor and coward who was reborn a bold resister, preaching and healing in the name of Christ even when threatened with imprisonment, floggings, or worse.

Now, by the power of Easter, **we** are a new creation. At the font God brought peace and holy order from the chaos of sin and death. In baptism God breathed on **us** the Holy Spirit, a spirit of power, not timidity or fear, so that, filled with peace and confidence, we might grow up to tell the Good News in our **own** words, according to our **own** witness, and invite the world to see and touch the wounds of Christ that spell victory and hope.

But there is **more** to the story of Jesus' wounds, which must always be at the forefront of the Jesus we proclaim. The power and effect of the resurrection is not for human beings alone. It is **all creation** that is restored. In this month when we have celebrated Earth Day we dare not neglect the truth that raising Jesus as the firstborn of all creation has profound implications for the earth and our relationship to her, as Pope Francis was so good at reminding us.

In the same ways that Jesus invites Thomas to see and to touch his scarred body, so God invites us to see and to touch the scars of the body of this earth,

especially in these days just after Earth Day: the scars of the ozone hole, of once-beautiful agricultural fields scarred by land mines, of clear-cut forests, of missing species, of tainted, bitter water, of plants that cry out when they are dehydrated or being cut down. The story of Christ, crucified and risen, changes the story and future of the earth. Christ now calls us to anoint her with a healing touch, to care for and protect her, to tend to her injuries, yes, but also to act to prevent any new assaults. For the earth, **too**, is one of the neighbors God calls us to love as we love ourselves.

Peace and breath...these are the gifts Jesus brings, not just on that first Easter, but on this **little** Easter, too. Peace and breath for all wounded, fearful creatures, for every bit of the world God loves. May the peace and breath we receive today in the Word and under bread and wine fill us with power to proclaim the Easter Good News and anoint us with compassion to love and care for all our neighbors, even our precious sister Earth. So that, in the end, as the psalmist sings, "everything that has breath [**will**] praise the Lord." Hallelujah!

Amen.