

Second Sunday of Easter

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Introduction

In a time of fear and uncertainty, Easter surprises us with a message of peace and reconciliation.

Text

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

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.

Comment

This resurrection story contains a great deal of conflict, both implicit and explicit. Doors are locked 'for fear of the Jews,' a category we might argue includes the disciples yet is meant to distinguish them from their contemporaries. Thomas, in his doubt, sets himself apart from and against his friends, and sets up a confrontation with Jesus. And then there is the peace that Jesus brings, repeatedly, because it repeatedly needs to be brought. A greeting of 'Peace be with you' implies that peace is not already present.

For those of us locked away in fear these days from one threat or another, whose blend of faith and doubt has yet to make sense of what Easter means in a post-corona context, John's huddled disciples seem all the more familiar.

It is strangely easy to miss, therefore, that this is a story of reunion and resolution, and of reconciliation. Fear transforms into joy in these moments. Doubt transforms into conviction through these encounters. Disagreement and confusion transform into a shared witness. This is all because a dear friend thought lost to death has returned. Whatever guilt these disciples may have felt for their abandonment of Jesus in the garden, their denying of him in the courtyard, or their powerlessness in the face of death, it has all been transformed by the forgiveness found in the risen Lord's greeting: 'Peace be with you.'

Conflict and division will persist after Easter -- because humanity will persist -- but Easter nevertheless offers us the power to be at peace in our altered reality.

Response

Easter leads us to see our present context in a new light: one of anticipated reunion and the eventual resolution to our current crisis, and with faith in the enduring power of reconciliation.

The surprise of Jesus in our midst encourages us to ask what we want a resurrected world to look like. What will transform our fears into joy? How will we change if we accept the peace that comes in knowing the power of life over death? With whom will we become reconciled once this separation is over -- when we are close enough to see each other's scars and to share each other's stories?

Prayer

Risen and reconciling God,
Your greeting after the grave
acknowledged the trauma and turmoil
of that time and our own.
The message of peace
was what your disciples needed to hear,
and what the world needs now.
When we are reunited
with those from whom we've been separated,
may our greetings, too, be of peace,
and may we see all division in the light
of your reconciliation
and all crises in the context
of your resurrection.

Amen.

Season: Ordinary time

Themes: Peace