

4/12/26

St. Paul's, MV

Easter 2A

John 20: 19-31

Years ago, during my time as a public-school teacher, I regularly took my turn (along with my colleagues) in the role of the playground *duty* during recess. Ours was a medium-sized school in Sedro-Woolley, a good neighborhood school, I think, and I was thankful that all three of my own children attended that school where I taught. One sunny autumn day, very early in the school year, as I stood enjoying the abundant energy and joy of children, who were away, for a few minutes, from their desks and books and projects, two sweet kindergarteners approached me. One of them was my younger son, Gabriel, who, at that point had only spent a few weeks in school. With him was another kindergartener, a new friend to him - and to me. As they approached, I could tell they were involved in a lively sort of kindergarten discussion, and once they reached me, Gabe, with a very serious expression, asked, "Are you my mom?" to which I replied, "Yes, I am!" And, with an *I told you so* sort of grin, Gabe turned to his friend and said, "See." It was then obvious that the discussion that they had been having was one that began with Gabe telling his friend that the *duty* was his mom, and the boy had challenged him on it. It was an obvious case of "Sure....prove it!" I can only imagine the conversation that had preceded their approach to me. "The Duty is my mother," Gabe might have said, to which the other boy may have said something like, "Yeh, sure, and my mom is Wonder Woman!"

Over the years and through and among the countless time I spent as teacher and mom, I can't tell you how many times I have heard a child harangue another with the

charge... *"Prove it!"* You have heard it too...with your own children – or someone else's – or an adult friends. Squabbles among otherwise friendly individuals. "Prove it!" is a challenge that puts the pressure on the one who has stated something...well, unbelievable. "Prove it!" says I won't believe it unless you show me in some verifiable manner. "Prove it," says I have doubts about what you've told me."

The gospel lesson for today is a story of Thomas, unfortunately stuck with the moniker, *doubting*, suggesting that he had less faith than other disciples (or possibly to distinguish him from other men called Thomas...) But, I'm not sure that the label *doubting* should be the focus here.

Remember the events leading up to Thomas' doubts. Mary had encountered the risen Lord on Easter morning and had rushed to tell the others, and *they* doubted her. So, they hid behind closed doors, because, John states, ***for fear of the Jews*** (a phrase sadly used often in this gospel book) Here, the phrase probably referred to the religious authorities/the keepers of the law who, with their power and knowledge, would know a member of the Jesus group when they saw one. So, the disciples thought, those authorities would be willing to hurt them/destroy them because of their affiliation with Jesus, rather than having them adhere to the Judaic law. *But, Jesus came to them anyway... in spite of their fears...*and stood among them. And, when they told Thomas (who'd been absent during that first meeting for some unspecified reason...) Thomas doubted the veracity of their story and basically said *"Prove it!"* to them. And, a week later, the disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus appeared to them...another time, and the reality of that visit by the resurrected Lord, was then enough for Thomas.

So, should Thomas be labeled faithless? I don't know, but it seems to me that the ones who showed a greater lack of faith might have been the other disciples, locked away, even after Mary had seen the risen Jesus and spoken to him. Even after they, themselves, had an amazing encounter with the resurrected Jesus (sans Thomas) After all that proof, they were again (just one week later) in that hidden place *for fear of the religious authorities*. The potential power of those authorities had manifested itself in fear and held them back.

The good news of the resurrected Jesus was not enough to encourage them to live as Easter people. . .*to live and be and speak as one who had seen the Good News*. And, in spite of their hesitancy, Jesus came to those cautious, frightened disciples and revealed himself again, giving them his peace, sending them out to share in his ministry, empowering them with the gift of the Holy Spirit as he breathed on them. Jesus came to them – unbidden and offered himself.

Just as then, Jesus comes to us now and repeatedly offers himself to people who long to see, who long to believe, to dismiss the doubts and live into the Easter good news. With no questions asked, Jesus offered (and still does...) the gift of his presence and his Peace. That's good news because just as for the disciples then, as for us today, living into the reality, the unbelievably good news of Easter – *just isn't always easy to do*. We celebrate Easter Sunday with fanfare and Alleluias, but we often slip back into doubts and fears days/hours later. Doubting and fearing is part of being human, it seems. If, at Easter, we are able to push out all our fears and doubts and hand them over to the life-giving power of the resurrection, it often does not take us long for the vocabulary of fear to creep back into our lives and push Easter out. We do that, as humans, so neither Thomas nor any of us disciples should be chastised for feeling fear or doubt. It simply is part of the human

condition and the times in which we live. But the gift in the good news of Easter is that the power, the hope, the light and the love of the resurrection is ours *when we are open to receive it. More good news.*

Jesus didn't lecture those disciples for hiding behind closed doors even after they had received the Spirit, nor did he censure Thomas for wanting a tactile experience. What the story of Thomas shows us is grace. The story of Thomas names the fears of those disciples...and ours. As we listen to the nightly news, often a litany of reasons to doubt and fear: (wars, immigration injustices, prices going up, crime, gun violence, misuse of power... just the headlines) our present-day worries fill us. I found myself going into a pit of worry this last Friday afternoon, after listening to the news commentators talk about the heat shield on the returning space capsule during re-entry. (*How many thousands degrees can a space craft stand??*) We are tempted, much of the time, to forget the reality of Easter and what it means to live and act as Easter people. But, Thomas, as told to us by John, reminds us that ***Easter is real*** - not simply an occasion for trumpet celebrations on one Sunday out of the year. Easter and the *daily life of resurrection* is offered to us, just as it was to the first disciples, even as they (and we) might be tempted by fears and doubts. The risen Lord comes to us and offers us grace and peace and life – and when we are open to receive it, we are made whole.

Annie Dillard, author of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, said it well. “The answer must be, I think, that beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will or sense them. *The least we can do is try to be there.*” Jesus comes to us, in spite of our fears and doubts, and he returns, and it is to us to receive the gift of peace and to live it.

When Gabriel asked me “Are you my mom?” and I happily replied that I was, his friend was satisfied with that truth, and though there will always be playground rows, sides taken, bullying or turf wars among the children on that or any other playground (or for that matter, rulers of differing countries....)these two small boys went off on that beautiful autumn day and played happily together, *as is the nature of children*. The friend had his answer and Gabe was satisfied. Doubts and fears and challenges were quieted. They were peacefully at ease – youngsters at play and little else mattered. Grace. We could use a great deal of that in our world just now.

Peace and grace are offered to each of us in the midst of our daily struggles, our skirmishes, our doubts, our fears – which are often fed by the news of the world or the conditions around us. And Jesus comes to us again and again – *And when we are ready and receptive, we receive that peace....and, we live it*. That is the ultimate good news of Easter. We live in the midst of life’s challenges – and *Jesus comes anyway, often and usually unbidden, and invites us into wholeness; invites us to live as Easter people in all the ways of life: doubts, challenges and joys*.

Pilot Astronaut Victor Glover spoke to the inhabitants of Planet Earth last week, just prior to Easter Sunday. He reflected on the vastness of the universe, which often feels like such great emptiness. He went on to remind us how special each of us is, and he encouraged us to live in the knowledge of the gift of creation – to live together. “In this oasis, this beautiful place that we get *to exist in together*.” “This is an opportunity for us to remember where we are and that we are the same thing. And that we got to get through this together.”

May you be blessed by the joy and the *good news* of Easter, and may your life reflect that good news in all that you do. Amen.

RDB