

2 Easter – Year C – April 11, 2010
Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31
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"This is something I have found to be true without exception: that when ...any of us, focus on things in our lives that are passing away, we get scared, we get anxious, we get depressed, we lose hope; and when we focus on things that are ... coming newly into creation, we get excited, we get imaginative, we get optimistic, we feel drawn closer to one another, we feel as if we have meaning and purpose in this life, and we have joy. . . . [W]e are given change as an ingredient in life. We can be frightened and anxious and resistant to it or we can embrace it as a tool to transform us." So says Bishop Jim Kelsey.

Just a passing glance at the Gospel reading for today shows us each of these elements: the grieving and fear of the disciples sequestered behind locked doors. The joy and excitement of seeing the risen Lord, knowing that He lives, and receiving the Holy Spirit. The resistant Thomas, who saw the change in the others, but lacked the trust necessary to take that leap of faith, demanding instead, his own proof of the resurrected Christ. The remarkable transformation that Jesus' presence brings about in Thomas, enabling him to shift from faithlessness to faith, and to be empowered for new life in the Holy Spirit.

Change is, no doubt, a huge part of what is happening to the disciples in today's Gospel lesson. There are many questions to be answered for this small remnant of Jesus' followers. Like, what really happened to Jesus' body? Why is John so adamant in his belief that Jesus has been raised from the dead, even though he can't explain what that might mean? Did Mary Magdalene really see the Lord in the garden? Are we going to be arrested and crucified like Jesus? What happens now? Change is always a part of what is happening in our own lives as well. Like a rolling and crashing wave, change has the power to bowl us over. How do we take care of an elderly parent, a child or a spouse who is seriously ill? What happens now I've lost my job, or when the economy is slow to bounce back, and my income has dropped sharply? Who will take care of me when I can no longer care of myself? Our own questions and fears are no less pressing than those of the disciples. What now? Yet, as the backwash pulls the now subdued water back it reveals sand washed smooth and fresh, ready for new footprints, ready to be re-modeled into a newly sculptured future. A fresh canvas onto which Jesus walks and stands beside us, in the moment. There is no door in the world that can stop the Lord from being amongst us, or that can separate us from the God.

"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." The Holy Spirit is like a great wind powerful enough to lift us off our feet, and yet gentle enough to fill us with the breath of life. The Holy Spirit empowers Christ's disciples to do the work that God has given us to do, both corporately as the church, and individually as members of Christ's Body. The discerning Spirit guides the whole Body of Christ. She helps the church to show the world love, goodness and beauty according to God's will. The Holy Spirit empowers the church to act on behalf of all who have no voice. He speaks through the church in *our* words and deeds to condemn what is not in accord with God's will. In this way, God empowers the church to forgive the sins of the repentant who wish to be reconciled to God through Christ Jesus, and to hold accountable those who refuse to hear God's Word. The work of the church in the world is to be wind and wave, light and love. It is to be a mirror that reflects truth and goodness, and reveals evil, always creating opportunities to reconcile the world to God in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Within the vast sphere of God's gracious activity in the Body of Christ, there is you and I, and there is Thomas. Just as the ocean tides claim new territory at each full moon, and at every storm; so is the breadth of the church in the world. Just as our lungs expand and draw in fresh air; so is the Body of Christ. By God's grace, the church is big enough to embrace those of little or no faith, and those who

are swept into the tides of life. The church is elastic enough to shelter those who are resting in the safe harbor of a community of faith, exploring what it might mean to become one with Christ. By God's grace the Body of Christ constantly draws in the faithful with each breathe of the Holy Spirit, as well as those who have lost their faith, the curious, and those who do not yet know Christ. All are welcome here. All are loved and accepted in this place. Today we welcome a new member of the Body of Christ through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. Susan has been amongst us for many weeks now. Will her baptism change the way we love her? Not at all. Will her baptism change her? Oh yes, in more ways that she or we can ever imagine. Like Thomas' sudden exclamation, "My Lord, and my God", at the presence of Christ before him, Susan's own testimony of faith is just the beginning of her new life in Christ.

For disciples Jesus, we can see, hear, and experience how our own lives of faith fit into the grand narrative of God's story of salvation. In the Book of Genesis, we read how "the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). In Ezekiel, we read how the Lord says, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." And today, as one Biblical scholar puts it, "Jesus, sent by the Father, "animates" the dust-bound, fear-slain, boney-faithed disciples with the life-giving Spirit" (Gregory Robbins). By faith in Christ, we are assured of the forgiveness of our sins, we are redeemed from death to new life in Him, we feel His presence, and are filled with God's love, joy and peace. We experience our resurrection lives now, as we put our own faith into action, by sharing our God-given gifts.

If we stand at the place where sand and sea interlace, we will see and feel the ocean crashing over our feet and legs. Mary saw and heard Jesus call her name in the garden and believed in Him. She felt Jesus' presence and clung to Him. The disciples locked away in the darkness, are like ones who stand on a pier gazing at the ocean with the wind blowing in their faces. They see and hear Jesus when He appears, and feel His breathe. That is enough for them to believe in Him. Thomas sounds like a child who has never seen the ocean and will not believe unless he can wade in it and feel the tide sweep him up. Yet when Jesus graciously returns eight days later and Thomas hears Jesus speak the words of invitation to touch Him and believe, Thomas immediately comes to faith.

Just like the first disciples, we too are commissioned to go out into the world. In what ways do we speak someone's name, hold out a hand, and lead them to Christ? Is it by sharing God's love with a child? Is it by sharing a gift of food with one who is hungry? Perhaps it is that phone call you made last week to a friend or neighbor. How have we helped others to experience the ocean and wind of God's gift of change, opening hearts and minds to Christ? We may never know. Sometimes others just watch and listen from a distance, while we go about our lives of faith with evident joy and peace. Who witnessed the power of Christ in you or me, and heard for themselves just how much God has done for us in our Lord and Savior? In the words of Edwin Hatch, from hymn number 508 in the Hymnal 1982, let us pray, "Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do." Today, tomorrow, and always, because Jesus lives!

Amen.