

# Sermon: Easter 2

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April 3, 2016

Year C

Acts 5:27-32

Psalm 150

Revelation 1:4-8

John 20:19-31

There's an expression I've known for many years... it seems wise... it seems eternal... it seems like an expression that's passed the test of time... it says: Truth can withstand scrutiny... Truth can withstand scrutiny... you can shine a thousand lights on it... you can ask whether it's true a thousand different ways... you can even choose to... or decide not to believe it... but if it's true... it's going to remain true in spite of you... so what does it have to fear... it has no ego that can be diminished... if it's true... it doesn't matter what names you call it... what insults you hurl at it... if it's true... it will be true in all places and in all situations... Truth can withstand scrutiny...

After Jesus left... and Thomas arrived... the disciples told him the Truth... they had seen Jesus and had seen his wounds... but Thomas didn't believe... that's OK... but wait a minute... just where was Thomas a little while ago... why wasn't he with the others when they were in a locked room for fear of the Jews... why wasn't Thomas afraid... apparently he was out and about conducting business... or running errands... hmmm... maybe he had enough courage to head out on his own... maybe that's why he had enough courage to ask to see Jesus' wounds... but some of us learned that you never question a grown-up... or your superiors... some people think... how dare Thomas question Jesus... why... why... it's like talking back to God... but Jesus is unfazed... God is unfazed... God says *Meh*... go ahead... question me... even if you want to like Job did... that's OK... I can handle it... I can handle your doubts... I can handle your need to be reassured... it's what I've been doing all along...

So is doubt the same as a lack of faith... aren't we just supposed to believe what we're told... theologian Paul Tillich wrote that an unquestioning faith... is no faith at all... because it shows a lack of engagement with the divine... but it also requires an element

of risk... and some courage... you may get an answer you don't want... and I think some people would rather complain about how things are... than do what's necessary to change them... and I've told the story before... about how... when I was growing up and we used to have Passover seders... and it'd be time to open the door and see if Elijah was there... that was scary... we really kind of didn't want him to be... because that meant there'd be big changes... and change stirs up all kinds of feelings...

Feelings are emotions... and emotions are energy-in-motion... they are also states of being... when we say *I feel*... we must also be able to say *I am*... but even though feelings are real... even though I would never want to invalidate anyone's feelings... sometimes feelings are not based in fact... a child may feel afraid about a monster under the bed... the feeling is real but perhaps the monster is not... but we don't shame them... we don't tell them how stupid they are for feeling that way... we don't invalidate how they are... we simply reassure them and comfort their doubts...

And there is fear around us... some real palpable fear... the fear of international terrorism... the fear of environmental pollution... the fear of not being able to effect meaningful changes in our lives... of being misunderstood... of not being safe when we go out to run errands... or of the car breaking down... the fear not being able to pay the bills... of not being in control... the fear of not being loved... but over and over again in the synoptic Gospels... the angels and Jesus tell people: *Do not be afraid*...

I don't think they're invalidating the people's feelings... I don't think they're trying to talk anyone out of how they feel... they're not being emotionally shaming... I think they're offering words of comfort... words of reassurance... I think they're offering the Peace that Jesus offers... because if you think about it... what we have when there is no fear... is peace... just a few vv. earlier... in 14:27 Jesus says: *Peace I leave with you... my own peace I give to you... do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid... I do not give to you as the world gives*... and today... when the disciples are huddled together in fear... Jesus again brings God's Peace... and he breathes the Holy Spirit on them...

I've always wondered about today's v. 23... *If you forgive the sins of any... they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any... they are retained...*

John Shea explains: the work of the Spirit is to make things One... and the path to this unity is through the forgiveness of sin... sin is what separates God from the world and people from each other... Jesus has taken away the sin of the world and replaced the underlying separation between God and the world... with communion... this communion depends on people forgiving one another and coming into unity... but we must engage in this responsibility... if we hold on to sins that separate... then separation will continue... if we let go of... forgive those sins... then unity will develop...

Before the crucifixion... Jesus told the disciples he'd be going... and that there'd be pain... he compared it to the pain of childbirth that is forgotten in the joy of new life... and he says that he will see them again... that their hearts will rejoice... and no one would be able to take that joy from them... his Truth could withstand scrutiny...

Today the disciples are in a locked upper room... Jesus' presence gave them his Peace... and *they rejoiced when they saw the Lord...* the Greek word that's translated as *saw* can also be translated as *perceived*... this suggests that the disciples had a spiritual realization of the presence of Jesus... that the reason no one can take their joy from them is because it's grounded in a spiritual presence that's not subject to loss the way a physical presence is... a new presence that's superior to the old one because it's a never-ending presence... and the joy that no one can take from them... mirrors a peace that the world cannot give...

This spiritual presence reassures us that God can find us wherever we are... even when we think we have hidden ourselves away... and God will assure us over and over to not be afraid... and give us the Peace that the world cannot give... God will not refuse us our fears... or our doubts... and will accept us in whatever condition we're in... with whatever feelings we have... and the result of naming and honoring our

feelings... is to know how we ARE... what our state of being IS... and God in Christ will teach us that how we feel doesn't need to determine what we do... even Jesus felt this fear... he asked that if possible... this cup be taken from him... but in spite of what he felt... he chose action he thought would kill him... but gave him eternal life... and in the end... it glorified him... and glorified God...

There have been times in my life... when I wanted certain cups to be taken away from me... like the first time I was in Civic Theatre or the first time I sang publicly... or things I had to do that I didn't believe I could do... or didn't want to do... things I didn't feel strong enough to do... or felt too unprepared to do... or too unworthy to do... or much too vulnerable to do... and I've learned that how I feel doesn't need to determine what I do... sometimes I feel too ambivalent about getting out of bed in the morning... but that feeling doesn't determine what I do... but almost always... I've learned that the anticipation of a thing... is far worse than the thing itself... and sometimes... my experience of it is so good... I think... hmmm... what's next...

And I believe that's why God gives us the Holy Spirit... and God's Peace... over and over again... until we forgive all there is to forgive... and we embrace all the unity there is to embrace... and until our all doubt is gone... after all... Truth can withstand scrutiny...

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