

# Sermon: Easter 2

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Year A  
Acts 2:14a,22-32  
Psalm 16  
1 Peter 1:3-9  
John 20:19-31

There's a scene in the HBO movie Boycott... about the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott... in which civil rights leaders E.D. Nixon... and Martin Luther King, Jr... watch Nixon's firebombed home burn... Nixon feels certain that white supremacists are behind the arson... but laments that they will likely go unpunished... and although the fire department has arrived... the white firefighters simply lean against their trucks... and watch as the house burns...

Nixon asks King how he can stick to his nonviolent principles... or if he even should... as he and his family are physically threatened and attacked by the powers opposing them... he doubts King's tactics... King doesn't answer him directly... instead... speaking slowly... as though it pains him to do so... he quotes from the letter to the Hebrews 10:39... *But we are not among those who shrink back... and so are lost... but among those who have faith... and so are saved...*

Ayanna Watkins... writes... our faith is not meant to keep us from responding to the violence inflicted upon us... our faith is the response to this violence... we may feel pain and sadness... even helplessness and loss... but we don't let our feelings make us shrink back from our values... we don't succumb to the fear that our opponents are strong than we are... instead... we believe and are saved... we believe that our God is strong... that what we stand for is true... that God is honored by our resistance to injustice... and that God is pleased when we refuse to submit to fear and helplessness... after all... this is what the resurrection changed...

Pastor Adam Ericksen writes... the resurrection is often packaged around cute bunnies and candy eggs... but resurrection is not safe but dangerous... it's dangerous because

it transforms how we relate to our fellow human beings... specifically to our enemies... and it transforms our understanding of the divine... throughout human history we have been caught up in cycles of violence... and we believed the gods were caught up in cycles of violence too... fighting each other... as we fought each other...

For example... he wrote... the resurrection of Jesus has been compared to the myths of resurrected gods throughout the ancient world... one such myth is about an Egyptian god named Horus and his father Osiris... Horus is portrayed as a good god... who fought against an evil god named Set... who killed Horus's father... Horus and his mother are able to resurrect Osiris... but the question remained... what should they do about Set...

The resurrected Osiris asked his son a question... *What is the most glorious deed a man can perform?* His son answered... *To take revenge upon one who has injured his father or mother.* And so that's what Horus did... and once he defeated Set in battle... he was acclaimed to be "Lord of all the Earth"...

Erickson continues... there's a certain amount of truth within this myth... throughout history... humans have believed that the only way to contain evil and violence is with our own violence... Horus wanted to destroy Set in order to establish peace... but the myth is also honest about another motivation... no matter how good and just our violence seems to be... it always carries within it... a motivation for revenge...

Ultimately... violence cannot be contained... it always escalates into cycles of increasing revenge... and we see this cycle not only in ancient myths... but also in the modern world... just like the violence between Horus and Set... the United States believes that the way to deal with evil is to violently defeat our enemies... we seek revenge by killing them... in other words... Horus is our divine model...

Our culture of violence is a national disgrace... some think that having more guns is the right answer... more guns in schools... and more guns in churches... and three days

ago... Arkansas conducted its first execution in twelve years... although Ledell Lee maintained his innocence... he was put to death... he was offered a last meal... and the meal he requested was Holy Communion...

Have you ever thought about how amazing it is... Jesus has just been tortured and crucified... he is resurrected... and while most people would seek vengeance before doing anything else... Jesus seeks not revenge... but reconciliation... the Roman Peace... the *Pax Romana* was a peace enforced by violence... but Jesus diffuses the cycle of violence... Jesus was not resurrected to seek revenge against his enemies... the resurrection of Jesus is the Good News that God isn't out for vengeance... instead... Jesus was resurrected to reveal God's radical offer of peace and forgiveness...

In the evening... on the first day of the week... the disciples were gathered together... with the doors locked... for fear of the Jews... but Thomas wasn't there... maybe he needed something from the corner market... maybe for some reason... he just wasn't afraid... and was out doing who knows what... or maybe he was so devastated by what had happened... that he decided he was done with this community... but Jesus appeared to them... and said... *Peace be with you*... twice... and he breathed on them... but the Greek means *into them*... as in Genesis 2:7... when 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... Jesus breathed into them... and gave them the Holy Spirit...

The next week... Thomas was with them... and Jesus again says *Peace be with you*... why that phrase... and why three times all together... because if this was like the resurrection myths the disciples knew... they had reason to believe that the resurrected Jesus would seek vengeance on them... after all... they had just betrayed... denied... and abandoned Jesus to his death... but here is Jesus promising Peace...

But Thomas won't believe... unless he sees the marks of the nails... and puts his finger in them... and puts his hand in his side... and to the degree that we see Thomas' doubt as negative... as a black mark of some kind... we miss the point of this Gospel...

Philosopher René Descartes is well-known for the expression... *I think... therefore I am...* as Descartes explained... *we cannot doubt of our existence... while we doubt ...* but a fuller form of the idea... written by Antoine Thomas... may capture Descartes' intent more fully... *I doubt... therefore I think... therefore I am...*

And it may have been this connection between doubt and being... that made Thomas' doubt... expressed to God... comparable to Mary's grief... expressed to the Gardener... that when we express any of these states of being well... we express something true to God... and so Jesus magnanimously invites Thomas to... *reach out your hand... and put it in my side...* but interestingly... the word that is tamely translated as *put...* also means... *to throw...* or... *to thrust...* a much more energetic image... reminding us of God thrusting God's hand into Adam... to pluck out a rib that would give new life...

When I was twenty-one... at the end of the summer... the mother of a friend came back from their cottage in Maine... as soon as I saw her... I knew something was different... she seemed more alive... more at peace... she seemed to give off a subtle kind of light... I didn't know what it was... but she had changed... and I knew that whatever it was... I wanted it... and when I asked her what had happened... she said she had learned Transcendental Meditation... in our Christian tradition... that would be Centering Prayer... a deep and living connection with the Ground of all Being...

I think it's this same kind of experience that brought Thomas back... something in that community... something about how he experienced Jesus... something that... in some ways... didn't make sense... because it transcended the senses... something that just didn't connect to the world... in the more limited way everyone thought it should... I think Thomas was able to trust his instincts more... that may be why he was able to

express the highest Christology in the Bible... *my Lord and my God*... but Jesus' resurrection was no Osiris myth... it was Gospel... it was the Good News that God doesn't hold our sins against us... but forgives us... offers us peace... and invites us to extend that peace to others... which we do... as Fr. Charlie Homeyer wrote... by thrusting our hands into the sides of suffering widows and orphans... the poor and the disabled... immigrants and prisoners... and pulling life out of them... we are raised with Christ from death to life in order to live... and to live lives of service... and we are called to make a difference in this world... Holy God... make it so...

Mike+