



April 16 2023 - Second Sunday of Easter  
Canon Paul Walker

Who can blame him? He just wasn't there.

All of the others had the luxury of being in the right place at the right time to be able to encounter the resurrected Jesus. But like us, Thomas wasn't there.

It was the evening of the first day of the week. It had been a very long day. Mary Magdalene, and Mary, Simon Peter and John had already seen the resurrected Lord early in the morning before dawn. And now they were all gathered together in the house in Jerusalem that evening, wondering if what they saw that morning in the dark was a pre-dawn illusion. They locked the doors for fear of the crowds, and Jesus came and stood among them. But Thomas wasn't there.

“Unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands, and put my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

A whole week passed and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said the same words he first offered a week earlier. Not “Where were

you?” Or “Why did you abandon me?” Or “How dare you?” He didn't upbraid them, chastise them, condemn them for the things they did or didn't do.

Jesus' first words to his friends that evening were “Peace be with you.” Then he showed them his hands and his side. It is interesting that the resurrected body of Jesus still holds the wounds. But the wounds are no longer sources of pain and trauma, but rather the wounds are vehicles for belief. After showing them his hands and side the disciples rejoiced. They recognized him, and they got it. The story could end there quite well, but John goes on.

Jesus repeats the same words, “Peace be with you,” and then does the most extraordinary thing. Jesus breathes on them. Now remember Jesus was dead. He was raised from the dead, and now in a new body, but still recognizable with the wounds, the resurrected body has the capacity to breathe. I suppose it makes sense. If Jesus can speak, he must be able to breathe.

The breath here is the wind of God. The divine wind. Luke records it in Acts as a violent rushing

wind that came upon them in Jerusalem at Pentecost fifty days after the resurrection. But John records it as happening on the evening of the first day of the week. In offering that wind, that breath, Jesus offers them the Holy Spirit with instructions about forgiving or retaining sins.

I find it interesting that John's gospel begins with John the Baptist saying, "Look, there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Those are the words we sing or say in the communion service before receiving the sacrament. It is a sign to remind us that what we are participating in is about a new creation of resurrection and, so closely related, forgiveness.

Now, at the end of John's gospel Jesus becomes the passover lamb, offered for the sins of the world, and in his first resurrected appearances in the gospel of John Jesus is passing on the task of forgiveness to the eyewitnesses of the resurrection. As if to say, this now is your task, your work, to proclaim liberty to the oppressed, freedom to the captives, and life to the downtrodden. It is summed up in what is central in all our liturgies: forgiveness. Peace be with you. You are absolved. You are set free. You are

not condemned. The voice of accusation is dissolved and overcome. Now go and do the same for others.

Fair enough, Thomas wasn't there. But a whole week later he was. Thomas didn't need to put his finger in the wounds or his hand in his side. He did the same thing that all the others did: he fell down and exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" And Jesus then includes all of those who will come after Thomas and all of the apostles. He includes all of those generations of people who, like Thomas, were not there. He includes us. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Because all they have - all we have - is their testimony and a sign of bread and wine.

"These signs are written that you might come to believe, and that through believing you may have life in his name." That life of resurrection, of new creation, is about forgiveness. And that begins here and now.

Peace be with you.