

On this second Sunday of Easter, I will be doing something a bit different than usual. I trust that the Spirit will help us all be engaged in what is about to unfold...

How many days are there in the season of Lent? 40 days! Yet, did you know that from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday there are actually 46 days. Does anyone know why? Well, Sundays do not count, because every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection!

So, how many days are there in the season of Easter? 50 days! Yet, in the Easter Season Sundays are included in the count! Day 50 is Pentecost Sunday, which will occur on Sunday, May 20th this year.

So, why is it that the Sunday after Easter is typically a Sunday with low attendance? It is because Protestant churches, of which we are one of many, have historically emphasized the day of Easter, rather than the season. We recount the miraculous resurrection with glorious worship on Easter Sunday and then return to worship as usual the Sunday after. We exclaim "Christ is risen! Alleluia! Amen!" But, then Monday comes and the glory of Easter fades fast.

Easter is a season and our Easter Banners will be up in this church until Pentecost. In reality though, Easter is really a way of life for us for we are Easter people. We are resurrection people. We are people who are to call forth life from the depth of the darkness and deadness in our world.

So, let's go back to gospel story as it is found in John. In John's Gospel, Mary Magdalene has come to the tomb as dawn breaks. She sees that the stone had been rolled away and so she runs back to the disciples and says, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved, then run to the tomb. They both go into the tomb and the text records that they believe.

But, Mary, who went back to the tomb again, stands weeping outside the tomb. She has an encounter with Jesus, although at first, she thought Jesus was the gardener. When Jesus speaks her name, she recognizes him saying, "Rabbouni" (which means teacher). But then Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me... go and tell my brothers that I am ascending to my God and your God." Mary Magdalene, was the first to see the risen Christ, and she announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!"

Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved witnessed Jesus' grave clothes neatly folded in the tomb, yet Jesus' body was missing. Peter and the other disciple believed something other than Jesus' body had been stolen, although they didn't fully comprehend what the scriptures said about Jesus rising from the dead. Mary had an actual encounter with the risen Christ and then she bore witness of her encounter to the disciples. So, the risen Christ has been both experienced and proclaimed, yet nothing much changed.

The text tells us that as night fell on the day we now call Easter; the disciples were behind locked doors out of fear. Fear not faith. Fear not resolve to proclaim what they had experienced and witnessed. Fear of those who had power over them. Yes, fear overwhelmed the followers of Jesus and they huddled together behind locked doors. Is it any wonder that we, celebrate Easter with such fanfare, but then Monday comes and nothing much changes? Could it be that we huddle in fear, afraid or unwilling to live into the resurrection power that we celebrated on Easter morn?

What are your fears? What keeps you huddling behind locked doors? What keeps us safely enclosed within the walls of this sanctuary afraid to venture forth into the darkness and deadness of our world? Turn to those you are sitting near and share with each other your fears,

what holds you back from living fully into the resurrection? I trust that you will hold each other's fears and pray for each other beyond this service of worship.

[I prayed for the fears shared with each other]

Into the midst of the fears of the gathered followers, Jesus said, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." Jesus displayed his wounds and suddenly his disciples believed. Yet, once again nothing much changes, for a week later the disciples are still huddled together in a room with the doors shut.

This time though Thomas is with them. This time Jesus says again, "Peace be with you." Then Jesus presents his wounds, just like he did the first time. And Thomas declares, "My Lord and my God!"

The text tells us that all of the disciples, not just Thomas, believed after Jesus displayed his wounds. Thomas wasn't asking for anything more than what the other disciples had already been given. Thomas was just more vocal! The text simply testifies that Jesus came again and again to those who were scared and confused. Jesus offers himself over and over again to those who long to see him.

As a contemporary Christian song pleads, "Open our eyes, Lord. We want to see Jesus. To reach out and touch him and say that we love him." Isn't this what Thomas declared to his fellow disciples? He just wanted to see and touch the risen Christ.

What about us? What proof would help us claim the power of the resurrection for our lives and for the life of this church? I clearly remember one of my brothers saying to me years ago, "Well, if God would just drop a rock on my head with a clear message for me, then maybe I would believe!" Or as Jill Duffield wrote, "We may well need reassurance that Jesus truly lives in a world so utterly awash in death, dying and evil."

Jesus showed his disciples his wounds. What proof would empower us to leave the safety of our locked rooms and venture into the deep need of the world all around us? What proof would help us claim the power of the resurrection more fully in our own lives and for the life of this church? Turn to those who are sitting near you and share with each other what proof from Jesus would be helpful for you, knowing that Jesus met Thomas' request. Be bold, just as Thomas was!

[Pray for the proofs requested]

Do you remember what Jesus first said to his disciples? "Peace be with you," but Jesus didn't stop with just dispensing peace. Jesus continued saying, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Dear Easter people, we are to be sent people. We are not stationary people. We are not to be fearful people locked behind closed doors. We are commissioned by Jesus to be sent people. But, our commissioning isn't about our own effort, for Jesus breathed on the disciples and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." John's Gospel records a far subtler Pentecost than the Book of Acts where a mighty wind roared and tongues of fire danced on heads. Jesus breathed on the disciples and the Spirit was received.

When we are sent, the Holy Spirit is within us just as Christ goes before us. As I am sent into the community each Wednesday as a volunteer in a 1st grade classroom at Kingsbury Elementary school, I spend a few minutes preparing by breathing deeply. Breathing deeply, as I pray for the students I will encounter. Breathing deeply reminds me that the Spirit resides within me and that Christ goes before me. My role is simply to be fully present to the students I

work with and what a joy it is to experience each child's precious uniqueness. I find being sent in to the world in this way is energizing.

Last fall, I challenged all of us to share how God is sending us into the community, whether it was as a prayer warrior or as a volunteer in some form or fashion. So, how have you been sent these past couple of months? How is the Spirit working through you to call forth life in those you encounter? Please share with those sitting next to you.

[Pray for God's Spirit to use even us!]

On Easter Sunday, I shared quite a few, "Oh no's!" Oh no! Jesus is alive! Oh no! The story has not ended. Oh no! What does this mean for my life? Oh no! How will Jesus call me out beyond the safety of my locked doors? Oh no!

Jesus said to his disciples, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He also said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Friends, we are blessed, although not just for ourselves. We are blessed to be a blessing.

In this world so utterly awash in death, dying and evil, we may need proof every now and then that Jesus is alive and that resurrection power is available to us and through us. Trust that Jesus will provide the proof we need, so that we will be willing to be sent! Amen.