

Homily for the Second Sunday of Easter, Year C
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
April 27, 2025

Peace be with you.

Hands down, St. Mark's, you win a prize for living into the joy and spirit of every Sunday's "Peace be with you" moment. So, it's no surprise that given this text, it's these words that have resonated in my ears as I prepared to share a good word with you this morning.

In many ways, our liturgy and life together centers peace. In our Sunday worship, the Peace is centered between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Table. It isn't a seventh inning stretch...it's included with the same deep intention of today's Gospel, offering us a deep and present reminder of the living Christ in our midst, as we see Christ in friend and stranger and pass the peace with each other. And we do it so well!

Today's Gospel begins on Easter evening. Grief and wonder were fresh, bewildering and overwhelming for the disciples who had watched their friend Jesus die an excruciating and painful death just days earlier. In the midst of that profound grief and fear, news may have begun to reach them that their friend's body had gone missing...some reported that the body had been stolen, others that it had been moved. Some had seen the empty tomb themselves; some were simply bewildered. Mary Magdalene, after her personal encounter with the risen Christ, had come to the house of the grieving disciples in joyful faith to announce and proclaim to them the Good News of Jesus' resurrection.

We know how that went.

What we're presented with at the onset of this Gospel isn't a scene of Easter joy. Instead John's Gospel draws us into this Easter evening scene where the gathered disciples...some having themselves been to the tomb, and others having just heard Mary's proclamation...were all gathered together behind closed, locked doors in fear for their lives. Into the midst of all of these doubters, Jesus appears. Seeing the fearful, doubting disciples, Jesus greets them with reassurance, "Peace be with you" and shows them his hands and his side. Only then, John tells us, they all rejoiced and believed. Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon them and again wished them peace, sending them forth to proclaim the Good News and forgive the sins of others.

As it happens, Thomas wasn't with that group of gathered disciples that Easter evening. His friends found him, though, and related the story of what they themselves had seen

and experienced first hand. Thomas has what I believe is a deeply human reaction: he also wants to have that personal experience of joy and belief that the other disciples have had! Seeing his previously doubting and fearful friends now rejoice at having themselves seen the risen Lord, Thomas reacts to them, perhaps out of the deep disappointment at having missed out on this incredible moment himself: *How can I experience the same joy you're having unless I get to experience it, too?*

Let me pause there. I think most of us have a version of this story in our minds where Thomas expresses doubt in the face of Jesus. But that's not how the story unfolds. I think there's a whole lot more going on in this story that we don't want to see, like we don't want to hear the disciples arguing over "who is the greatest" at the table with Jesus on the night he was betrayed. I think it might be more accurate to say that Thomas reacts skeptically to his friends' encounter with the risen Christ, the way the they all reacted skeptically to Mary Magdalene's witness. Everyone wants to believe, but they want to experience it for themselves. Thomas wants to see and feel what they saw and felt. Experience fuels our belief.

Let's think about that in our own lives. How often do we want and crave the experiences of resurrection and faith that we hear other people are having? Why do we feel some kind of way when others carry joy in the midst of uncertainty? We might begin to think something is wrong with us, or fear that we are missing out. Thomas, disciple and human being, is crying out like so many of us have done, "why them and not me, God?"

And Jesus hears his prayer.

I don't know what Thomas' spiritual life was like during that post-Easter week, filled with a sense that he has missed out, hearing the other disciples talk about something that he wished he, too, could have experienced. I imagine there were lots of thoughts going through his mind. Maybe some of the psalms and prayers of his faith expressed his frustration, and maybe familiar beliefs and practices sustained him. Maybe he was just frustrated and cynical...I can't say that I haven't felt that way sometimes. But what I do know is that the following week, on the first day of the next week, he showed up, gathering with the other disciples together in the house, again with the doors shut.

And what happens next is the heart of this story: On that Sunday after Easter, Jesus meets Thomas exactly where he is at, knowing exactly what he needs.

Jesus appears to Thomas and reassuringly greets him and all the disciples again, "Peace be with you." And then, John's Gospel tells us, he speaks directly to Thomas in his own place of human longing, speaking to the prayer that Thomas has been lifting in his own

particular mix of bewilderment, confusion, frustration, grief and longing. Jesus says to Thomas, without any hesitation, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’

And Thomas responds, “*my Lord and my God.*” [Ὁ Κύριός μου καὶ ὁ Θεός μου]

What this Gospel lesson gives us is yet another reminder of the profound, intimate, loving presence of Christ entering into the most human places of our lives. The Good News of this Gospel lesson rests in the knowledge that the conditions we impose on ourselves and each other in our doubtful, frustrated humanness are no match for the boundless love of God, expressed in Jesus Christ.

Jesus knows us, Jesus meets us where we are, and Jesus invites us into belief.

Jesus the teacher then offers a lesson for Thomas. But by extension, it is for all the gathered disciples. *‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’*

Like Thomas, we are met by this Gospel text today, right where we are. We may not have been in the room where it happened, but we have come to see and believe as witness of the resurrected Christ.

We have the experience of seeing the workings of Jesus Christ in one another, in our shared lives together, in the beloved faces of each person with whom we share the Peace of Christ. We have received the Holy Spirit, the breath of God who is working in and among us to make us the hands and heart of Christ in this world.

Blessed are we when we pray for someone, and we remember that someone is praying for us. Blessed are we when something we need shows up just when we need it, or when we hear exactly what we need to hear, even if it comes from the lips of the person we least expect to offer us that wisdom. Blessed are we when we volunteer to help our neighbors and someone sees Christ in our actions of outreach and love. Blessed are we when someone extends love and compassion to us and we see Christ in them instead of our own pride and stubborn independence. And blessed are we when we see Christ in the faces of our neighbors, the words of a stranger, the glimpses of everyday grace. Blessed are we in the quiet moments of prayer when we suddenly know, even in the midst of our human doubts and fears and loneliness, that we are not alone; that we are seen, and loved, and held even in our darkest hours. We are met and blessed continually with Christ’s presence in the faces of our community: with the Peace we exchange with

one another, and the Peace of Christ that we carry with us out of these doors and into a world that is filled with fear and anxiety.

This is what it means to be the Body of Christ, the Church.

The Good News, my friends, is that the risen Christ loves us, and meets us exactly where we are, exactly as we are. Whether we are the grievers who believe at the gentle sound of our name, the doubters who believe when Christ appears in our midst, the yearners who hear of great news that they long to experience themselves, or among the blessed who have not seen to whom grace, love and forgiveness will be offered for generation upon generation in the name of the risen Christ. We will be met where we are, by Jesus Christ who loves us.

Like Mary at the empty tomb and like Thomas in that closed door room, may we be bold to say: *“My Lord, and my God”* and continue to share that Good News with the world.