

Scripture:

John 20:19-31

“Jesus stand among us!”

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a community evoking ----- community forming ----- and community authorizing event.

And our gospel reading this morning invites reflection ----- not so much on the dramatic miracle of the resurrection ---- but on the community that is the outcome of this miracle.

The disciples are gathered in fear ----- verse 19 from John’s gospel reading today ----

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together ----- with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders...”

Jesus has been crucified ---- He has arose --- but up until now only Mary has seen the resurrected Christ.

“Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news “I have seen the Lord!” ---- verse 18 says --- we heard it last week ---- but now today beginning at verse 19 ----- the disciples are about to see the risen Lord themselves ---- first hand.

But they are fearful --- hiding being closed doors --- unsure of what will happen next.

Resurrection ---- O.K. ---- but now what? ----- they asked themselves.

Easter --- O.K. ----- but now what? --- we might be asking ourselves.

We’ve been through ----- Palm Sunday --- and ----- “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” ---- and ---- “Hosanna ---- Hosanna in the highest heaven.”

We’ve been through Maundy Thursday ----- with Jesus gathering His disciples---- washing their feet ----- and sharing in a meal.

We've been through Good Friday ----- betrayal ---- mocking ----- sacrifice -
-- suffering ---- and crucifixion.

----- "Father forgive them ---- for they know not what they do."

---- "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

----- "It is finished."

We've been through all this.

And we've also been through Easter Day --- resurrection ---- "Hallelujah He
is Risen" ----- the empty tomb.

And so ----- now what!

Where do we go from here?

Well for the disciples there was a profound sense of fear?

And in comes Jesus --- standing among them and breathing the Holy Spirit
into them ---- saying ----- "As the Father has sent me ---- I am sending you."

Go and do as I have done ---- preach the forgiveness of sins ----- share the
kingdom of God.

All along --- Jesus has stood among His disciples ----- breathing new life
into them ----- and today as He appears among them after His resurrection --
---- it is no different.

Now I don't know about you but I certainly sensed Jesus standing among us
---- this Holy Week ---- and Easter Day.

I can certainly say that I had a profound experience of God's presence -----
Jesus standing among us over the 8 days of Palm Sunday ----- Maundy
Thursday --- Good Friday and Easter Day --- and I'm certain I'm not alone
based on what some of you have shared with me.

And this didn't just happen because so many people here at St. Andrew's
worked hard ----- readers --- singers ---- creative planners and so -----
although this certainly helped for sure.

But our experience of Jesus standing among us --- is all because of Jesus.

His blessing us with His presence --- just because.

Just because of who He is ----- the loving ---- saving --- reconciling one --- bringing people together.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a community evoking ----- community forming ----- and community authorizing event.

And our gospel reading today invites us to reflect ----- not so much on the miracle of the resurrection itself ---- but upon the community that is the outcome of this miracle.

Something absolutely unheard of happened after Jesus was crucified --- and it wasn't just the resurrection ---- it was also His empowering of the disciples.

The disciples gathered in John's gospel reading today --- for the very first time post resurrection --- unsure of what was going to happen next.

And Jesus comes to meet them --- settles them down ---- and guides them in the direction of God's choosing.

Maybe like the first disciples --- after the first Easter --- some of us are gathered here today with a bit of a question mark.

What's next --- what's going to happen today at worship?

Hasn't it all been said --- Palm Sunday ---- Maundy Thursday ---- Good Friday --- Easter Day ---- hasn't it all been done ---- what could possibly be next?

Perhaps that's kind of what the first disciples thought as they gathered.

And then something unheard of happened ----- empowerment ---- for the future.

There is no waiting until 50 days after Easter day ----- the day of Pentecost for Christ to share the Holy Spirit in John's gospel.

Today --- one week after Easter day ----- John shows us Christ breathing the Spirit of God into the disciples.

Sure it happened at Pentecost but it also happened today as the disciples gathered in an upper room confused and fearful.

Jesus stand among us ----- breathing the Holy Spirit into us ----- isn't just for Pentecost ---- or heightened moments in our lives or in the life of the church ----- some time later on.

Jesus stand among us is now --- the eternal now as one theologian described it.

And Jesus stand among us ---- has implications.

After having breathed the Holy Spirit into His disciples Jesus says these words ---- John 20 verse 23 ----- “If you forgive anyone’s sins --- their sins are forgiven --- if you do not forgive them --- they are not forgiven.”

“If you forgive anyone’s sins --- their sins are forgiven --- if you do not forgive them --- they are not forgiven.” ---- talk about a bit of a confusing verse.

Does this mean the disciples actually have the power to forgive sins?

Isn't that something only God in Christ can do?

And if not --- then what might it mean?

Well ----- I think it means something like this.

Jesus was giving the disciples their Spirit powered and Spirit guided mission ----- to share the Good News about Him so that people’s sins might be forgiven and they too might experience Easter life ----- new life --- salvation ---- freedom from sin.

The disciple’s didn’t have the power to forgive sins --- only God can truly do this ----- but Jesus did give them the privilege and responsibility of sharing that sins are forgiven when we accept Jesus and believe in Him.

One can only announce the forgiveness of sin with certainty ---- once one has found and experienced such repentance oneself.

You can't share something unless you already have it yourself and know to be true.

In other words ---- "If you forgive anyone's sins --- their sins are forgiven --- if you do not forgive them --- they are not forgiven." --- means that we are to lead people to Christ ----- so that He can forgive their sins ----- because if we don't ---- their sins will never be forgiven --- because only he can do this.

"If you forgive anyone's sins --- their sins are forgiven --- if you do not forgive them --- they are not forgiven." --- means go and tell people about life in Christ --- forgiveness of sins --- because He is the great forgiver and reconciler.

Go and tell people that God knows all there is to know about you and He loves you --- He forgives you.

God ---- in Christ has taken away the sins of the world ---- fear --- anxiety and all that ails us --- and we are to turn and share this news with everyone we encounter.

Jesus needs us.

He needs us to share this news --- and help Him build the kingdom of God -- -- here and now.

Jesus stand among us means its time for us to leave our hiding places ---- return to the world ---- and share Easter --- share Jesus ----- share forgiveness ---- share God loves you no matter what because He forgives you no matter what.

And if we're a little unsure about all of this.

If we're a little unsure if we're actually forgiven.

If we still hesitate a bit about being convinced about this whole Easter thing ----- if we think something like ----- “Really ----- can someone actually rise up from the grave?”

If we think things like this ---- and are a little unsure ----- that’s O.K. too.

Look no further than Thomas in John’s gospel today.

He doesn’t want to go on someone else’s experience --- he wants to experience Christ crucified and risen ---- for himself.

Jesus gets this --- He understands this completely.

He doesn’t reprimand Thomas when He sees him --- He doesn’t talk about Thomas as having little faith ----- instead He simply goes to him.

Manifests Himself to Thomas --- and of course Thomas is then convinced.

Once it is made clear and known to us that we are forgiven.

That God knows absolutely all there is to know about us and that He still loves us --- then and only then can we go and share this profound love and forgiving nature of God with others.

That’s what ----- “If you forgive anyone’s sins --- their sins are forgiven --- if you do not forgive them --- they are not forgiven.” --- means.

Only once we know --- are convinced --- have experienced in a real personal ----- “cut to the heart” kind of way --- that God loves us and forgives us --- then and only then can we truly go and share this same forgiveness with others.

When Thomas says ----- “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were ---- and put my hand into his side --- I will not believe.”

Part of what he’s saying is until I have my own personal experience with the risen Christ ---- I’m not convinced.

We can’t share something without first accepting it ourselves.

We can't share Christ without first some kind of personal experience with Him.

For some --- like Thomas ----- that experience needs to be evidential --- concrete --- tangible.

For others God grants the gift of faith.

Both are personal experiences with Christ --- but just a little different.

Near the very end of our gospel passage today Jesus says ---- in verse 29 ---- and He's speaking to Thomas here ----- "Because you have seen me --- you have believed ----- blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Some experience Christ in far more evidential --- concrete --- tangible ways ----- through miracles ----- others in far less dramatic ways ---- no need for a miracle ----- instead it might be a feeling they have a --- revelation of the heart or mind ---- and so on.

I for one ---- don't need a miracle --- God has revealed Himself to me without a miracle --- but that's just me --- maybe some of us are the kind of people that need a miracle --- hang in there ---- God will meet you wherever it is you need Him most ---- and that's the truth.

The Holy Spirit of God is mysterious and unpredictable.

The Holy Spirit of God meets us in ways that we can understand ---- and be convinced of --- just as Thomas became convinced.

And it can be radically different from one person to the next.

Jesus standing among us ----- post resurrection ----- breathing the Holy Spirit into us ----- is kind of like the final piece we need to go out into the world and share ----- the saving --- loving --- forgiving ----- nature of God.

The disciples are told to leave their hiding place --- come out from behind the closed doors ---- and move out into the world ---- proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom of God --- the forgiveness of sins.

Just as Holy Week is a lead up to Easter Day.

So Easter Day ---- is a lead up to what we experience in John's gospel today ----- Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit into His disciples so that they might continue to do what He was doing.

Jesus didn't just walk out of the grave --- only to return to business as usual -- and carry on Himself proclaiming the kingdom of God and the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus walked out of the grave yes to say --- O.K. folks there is a new reality - ----- sin and death no longer rule the day or have the final say.

But He also walked out of the grave to say --- O.K. my followers ----- now I am going to commission you ---- breathe the very breath of God into you --- to continue what I started --- because in a couple of weeks ----- I'm going back to God's side and I'm going to need you to share my story --- my life -- --- me.

Jesus needs us --- Jesus chooses us ---- He involves us in His great plan.

And He does so because He is all about relationship --- the relationship that first begins deep in the trinity ----Father ---- Son --- and Holy Spirit ----- extending now to include us as well.

I began today saying -----

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a community evoking ----- community forming ----- and community authorizing event.

And our gospel reading today invites reflection ----- not so much on the dramatic miracle of the resurrection itself ---- but upon the community that is the outcome of this miracle.

The resurrection ---- wasn't ever just about one man doing one thing.

The resurrection is all about one man doing one thing for many people ---- indeed for all people.

That's precisely why it's a community forming and relationship building.

Jesus reveals Himself to His followers --- when? --- when they are together.

Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into His disciples when? ----- when they are together.

Jesus commissions His disciples when? ----- you got it --- when they are together.

It's Jesus stand among US.

And not just Jesus stand within me --- or Jesus stand with me.

“Jesus came and stood among them....” ---- verse 19 says today.

And when Thomas doubts and questions --- Jesus waits until they're all together again --- a week later --- before He reveals Himself to Thomas.

He doesn't go to Thomas alone throughout the week ---- He could have but He didn't ----- instead He waits until they're all together again --- including Thomas.

Jesus stand among us ---- is all about Jesus and us --- not juts me --- or you - -- or just me and you --- but it's about me and you and you and you ---- and Jesus.

It was time for the disciples to leave their hiding places --- and continue what Christ began.

And it was time for the disciples to leave their hiding places and continue what Christ began with the understanding that nothing could stop it ----- not even death.

Jesus is the very best --- and most valuable thing we've got in this world.

Shouldn't everyone now this --- and shouldn't everyone know Him.

And so ----- we must go ----- and we must share Him.

We must share the Christ that is among us.

In word and in deed --- in kindness and in ----- silence ----- let God be your
lead.

Amen.