

Second Sunday of Easter – Year B – The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony – 4.11.21
Acts 4: 32-35, Psalm 133, 1 John 1: 1-2:2, John 20: 19-31

Have you ever considered how the disciples got from huddling together in fear to going out and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Resurrection? On the surface it seems unlikely. They were a frightened band of men and women who had lost the one in whom they had placed their trust. They did not make such a momentous change on their own. They did not change because they had no other choice. The disciples were able to overcome their fear and speak in faith of the kingdom of God because God was present to them and walked with them wherever they went on the journeys they would take. Instead of a small sect of Judaism, the disciples following the command of Jesus went out into the entire world to be the light to the nations and to tell their story.

They started where they found themselves, huddled in fear behind locked doors. They had a right to fear, both the religious authorities and the Roman military. It would have been an easy choice to leave Jerusalem and return to their former lives, letting the experiences of the past three years become only a fantastic memory. But then, Jesus came and stood among them. It was the first time that he had been with the community of faithful since he had been arrested, tried, and condemned. His first words to them were words of comfort, words that they had heard before. "Peace be with you." And then Jesus showed them his hands and his side, evidence that he was real, the Messiah they had followed and loved. Again, he said to them; "Peace be with you." Peace, yes but also a command. The command that was for them and for us. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." It was those words of peace that gave them the courage to move beyond their fear and beyond the locked room to the world. The words of peace that gave them the power to obey.

The peace that Jesus brings to us is not simply the absence of strife. It is a peace that is a gift offered to each of us. It is the peace of the soul, the peace that knows the love and forgiveness of God. It is the peace that gives us courage to be sent as Jesus was sent to offer that same peace of love and forgiveness to those we encounter in our lives.

It did not happen all at once. The first encounter with the risen Lord happened on the evening of the first day of the week. The disciples were still in that same house behind locked doors a week later. One of their number, Thomas had not been with them on that evening of the first day of the week. We don't know where he was. Perhaps he needed a bit of solitude to come to terms with all that he had seen. Maybe he needed to be apart to absorb his grief and disappointment in how things had turned out. Maybe he needed space to come to the place where he could rejoin the others. They had told him the wonderful news that Jesus was alive, but he would not believe them on the words alone. He required evidence, the evidence of his senses, his sight, touch, he needed to hear the words of peace for himself. As we all do. We all come to faith by different roads, but we all come of our own choice and our own experience of God. No one can have faith for you.

Thomas, called the doubter, has been misunderstood. Doubt is not the opposite of faith, but a part of it. Questioning is healthy and leads us to deeper understanding, to personal insight. People often admire a 'childlike' faith. That is different from a childish faith. It is childlike to question, to ask to try to make sense and then to accept what has been learned. It is childish to accept without thought or reservation someone else's experience. Thomas in his

questioning, his seeking evidence, his demand for tactile proof was childlike in his faith. Have you ever known a child who was not full of questions? Who did not want to touch what was within arms reach? Who did not want to taste whatever they found?

Our translation of the scripture seems to say that Jesus rebuked Thomas for his questioning, for his seeking of evidence, a seeking of truth. Jesus final words to Thomas are said to be "Do not doubt but believe,"

A better translations of those words from the original language would be this: "Do not be unbelieving, but believing." The emphasis is not on Thomas' lack of faith, but on Jesus' invitation to Thomas to see and believe. That is Jesus' invitation to us as well. It is in question, in doubt, in conversation and in prayer that we come to see and in seeing to believe. That was the invitation of Jesus to the disciples in the house in Jerusalem, an invitation that is given to us as well. No matter where any of us is on our journey, Jesus invites us to make a choice, to doubt, question, ask and finally to resolve our questions and our doubt to believe. It is a lifelong process, for as we doubt and question, as we resolve those issues we will raise new and deeper issues for doubt, and question. It is what gets each of us out of the locked room and into the world to which we are sent.