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**Easter 2, April 16, 2023**

“Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you’.” May I speak in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

On the evening of the first Easter, the disciples sat anxiously in a closed off room. Surely the news Mary Magdalene had brought them couldn’t be true. Right? They might not have been as educated as we are today, but even they knew that crucifixion usually meant the end of a life. After what they’d seen done to Jesus, they were certain there was no way he was going to come back. And then he did.

He arrived intact, almost as good as new save for the scars on his hands. The last time they’d seen him, his body had been broken and bloody, but the Jesus standing before them was whole. We can only imagine the shock and joy they felt as they were faced for the very first time with the resurrected Christ. Sure, he had said that he was going to come back, and sure, they’d heard from Mary that the tomb was empty and she’d seen him, but could it *really* be him? When he came to them, they seemed to not be able to believe their eyes. This happens a few times in the Easter narrative, people seeing Jesus and not recognizing him, or maybe not quite being able to believe what they’re seeing. So he says to them, “Peace be with you,” and shows them his scars. Only then do they finally understand that this is the real deal, the risen Christ is here and standing before them.

This Gospel is often referred to as the “doubting Thomas” Gospel because in it, Thomas has to see the wounds in Jesus’ hands to believe that he is who he says he is. That always struck me as odd because earlier in John when word came that Lazarus had fallen sick, most of the disciples didn’t think Jesus should go to him because he had already started to gain ill favor with some of the people in Bethany. Thomas was the only one to say, “Let us also go so that we may die with him.” He didn’t know what was going to happen, but he was ready for any outcome, including death. That sounds like faith to me, so this sudden bout of doubtfulness feels out of place to me. In the Greek New Testament, the word used is *pistos*, best translated as “faithful.” In Greek, the last part of the verse reads, “kai mē ginou apistos alla pistos,” which I have translated into English as, “and do not be unfaithful, but faithful.” And Thomas was faithful. He alone cried out, “My Lord and my God!” when he realized the man standing before him was Jesus. He alone was ready to face the danger in Bethany alongside his friend and teacher. And remember: the other disciples also didn’t know for sure that Jesus had returned until they saw him standing in front of them; Thomas wasn’t alone in his uncertainty.

In 2002, Jeremy Camp released his song “Walk By Faith”. It was an anthem during my childhood and I still find myself singing it often. In the refrain he sings, “Well I will walk by faith, even when I cannot see, well because this broken road prepared Your will for me.” As an adult, this feels different than it used to. You see before, as a child, I thought that doubt was the

opposite of faith. As I've grown, both in maturity and in my spiritual life, I've learned that in fact, doubt amplifies faith. Without the questions, the uncertainty, the "what ifs", there would be nothing to believe *in*. Our life in faith is one that relies on questions and uncertainties; none of us were there the day the empty tomb was found. All we have is a few peoples' accounts of what happened that day, and there are inconsistencies in those stories. So where does that leave us? It leaves us with faith; even though we weren't there to personally witness the empty tomb, we still believe in the risen Christ. We have seen the way God works in our own lives, the way the Holy Spirit moves in our families, friends, and neighbors, and have felt the resurrection joy at Easter. I have seen God in action when I've hugged my sister after months apart, or when a friend helped me clean my apartment after a long week, or when I walk outside early in the morning and the sky looks like a watercolor painted just for me. We have seen, as Peter says in Acts, God's deeds of power, wonders, and signs, and for us, that is enough. Jesus blesses us when he says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and come to believe".

Our faith is a gift. It enables us to live every day in that resurrection hope. We know that in the resurrection of Christ, our sins are forgiven. What we do with that faith matters. It's not a free pass to act wrongly and be cruel, but it's a call to action. In today's Gospel, Jesus breathes onto his disciples, saying, "*lábete pneuma hagion*." Another Greek word, *pneuma* means "breath" or "spirit". You might be more familiar with its Hebrew counterpart, *ruach*. This fulfills what John the Baptist proclaimed when he said that Jesus was indeed the chosen one and would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you," Jesus told the disciples. Christ is calling each of us to go out into the world, proclaiming the Good News and spreading the gospel. Episcopalians are notoriously afraid of the word "evangelize", but evangelizing doesn't have to be the image that we conjure up when we think about it. We evangelize in our everyday actions, by bringing our sick friends supper and responding to unkindness with kindness, by seeking and serving Christ in all people and loving our neighbors as ourselves. The way we live reflects the message of the Gospel of Christ, the Christ who sent the disciples into the world in his name to preach, teach, and pastor to his flock. The collect for today said, "Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith." I promise, you don't have to stand in a pulpit and preach to a room full of people in order to evangelize! Showing forth in your lives what you profess by your faith is all that is required.

We have not seen Christ's scars in person, we haven't touched his side to feel where the spear pierced him, and yet, we believe. In a few minutes we'll say the Nicene Creed and profess to believe in Jesus Christ, who suffered death and was buried, but on the third day rose again from the dead. I've seen a lot of movies about people rising from the dead, but I've never seen it happen in real life, but my faith is founded in the resurrection of our Christ. We walk by faith even when we cannot see the scars on his hands because our faith is stronger than the doubts and uncertainties and what-ifs. By living an embodied faith, we join the disciples in proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ and the hope found in the resurrection.

Amen.