

Sunday, April 11, 2021 Psalm 100, Acts 4:32-35; John 20:19-31

Laughter and Hope in the Risen Christ!

Spiderman 2 with Tobey McGuire (2004) shows Peter Parker running on the roof top towards the edge of the building and as he jumps off he shouts, "I'm back". Unfortunately, for this Peter, his Spidey sense was not working and he falls on hanging laundry, a two cars, and the ground. Then Peter expresses his pain, "o my back!" Maybe Spiderman was not really back to what he expected to be in that moment.

But can you imagine the expression of Peter, Jesus' disciple when Jesus comes into the locked room where most of the disciples had gathered? What did Jesus say when he appeared before the fear-filled disciples? "I'm back!" Well maybe not quite but one can imagine the confusion, the joy and the many questions they had for Jesus. How could this be? It was almost like a press conference for a celebratory announcing a new movie. But this was no movie. Jesus was really alive. This was no joke-Jesus was not a ghost or apparition of some kind. Jesus was present in the room with the disciples on the evening that Mary had said she had seen Jesus.

Our world is facing a tough time; our country is experiencing the third wave of a pandemic which in the minds of many should not be occurring. But this is the reality we are now in. Further stay at home orders; further control of what we can and cannot do has been explained again and again. Yet, the number of cases continues to rise. There has been many losses- of life, employment, focus and wonder of what life will bring. And there is fear of what will happen next, how all of this—will affect each individual and how everything will be changed for the good or not so good. We are worried about tomorrow and what it might bring- but we are also people of faith and because we are an Easter people- believing in Christ's resurrection, we need to have hope.

But who is this Risen Christ? How do we know him? Different people have envisioned Jesus through what he has done. The ASL (American Sign Language" sign for Jesus is like this-- (touching the marks of the nails in the centre of each hand with your middle finger..) So this means that Jesus is known by his scars. But others like Jack Jewell, a seascape artist painted Jesus after his resurrection. In "Risen Christ by the Sea" Jesus has a huge smile as he holds a fishing net. In the painting Jesus is full of Easter joy and healing love. Here Jesus' face is of hope and is the light shining in the darkness of our times. For many years this image has been used to support the ministry of Christ as it represents "The Easter Laugh" – God's last laugh on the devil when He raised Jesus from the dead. And with laughter there is joy because death is no longer- if we believe in eternal life made possible through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Last Sunday we celebrated Easter. We remembered the story of Mary at the tomb early in the morning. The man she thought was the gardener had spoken her name and she knew it was her teacher. She told the disciples that she had seen the lord. They returned to the tomb but did not see Jesus. But they saw the cloths that had bound him. We don't know where Jesus went that day. But we do know that the disciples were afraid as they would be accused of

stealing Jesus' body and claiming he rose from death. But this was not the case either. In the evening, while most of the disciples were present- Jesus appears in the room. And this is the part that has been debated since- was Jesus' body the way it was before death? If so how did he get into the room? Was what the disciples saw really flesh like? We must assume that after Jesus' death, those who had prepared his body for burial would have cleaned and washed him up. He would have been bloody and dirty. Tradition would have lead those doing this task to wrap up the body in linen cloths including the face. But what we are told is that Jesus left the cloth covering his face in the tomb and any extras he did not need. So when Mary sees him, he is clean and presentable. This is also the case later that night when he appears to the disciples.

The disciples are afraid—to look, to see to touch. They are in shock. They are confused and they wonder about the disciple who wasn't there and how he would respond. Jesus doesn't stay long but offers them a blessing of peace. "As the Father has sent me so I send you." Then He breathed on them, "Receive the Holy Spirit". If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any they are retained." Then he left.

One can only imagine the conversation about Jesus after he has left. Was it real? Was that really Jesus? Why come here when we are afraid? Just what did he mean about 'the Holy Spirit' and forgiving others. Just what were they supposed to do now? A short time later Thomas returns to be with the rest of the disciples and they tell him that Jesus was there. But what is amazing is Thomas' response! He did not believe those with whom he had spent the last 3 years. He wanted proof! "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side. I will not believe."

We are not told what they did in the next few days. If they had listened to Jesus' teachings before his death, my hope was that they each spent a lot of time in prayer—asking God to lead them to do what was needed next. The gospels do not tell us. All we do know is that Jesus loved his disciples. He loved Thomas and Thomas loved him. He just wanted to see Jesus for himself. So Jesus gives Thomas what he needs. He shows up again for him. Thomas sees him and believes. Jesus shows up for Thomas just like Jesus is with us even when we do not realize it. Jesus is with us when we need him to show us His way of love.

Jesus has been walking the halls and corridors of hospitals, makeshift trauma centres, funeral homes, and houses around the world. He has been the unspoken guest in rooms as loved ones have passed away due to covid19 and no one spoke in the moment of transition from life, to death to eternal life. Jesus shows up even in the moments when sadness turns to joy. When joy turns to laughter as memories are shared; as death gives way to victory and the light of God's glory is witnessed by all. And in these moments there are tears of love, of joy of wonder and there is laughter.

Jesus showed up for the disciples- in a room where the doors were locked and they were afraid for their lives. He eased their minds with a blessing of peace. And he showed them

what his resurrection meant- He did what he said he would do--die to rise again for the sake of all others. And Jesus smiled as he shared his love with his closest friends.

As we continue to celebrate Jesus' resurrection, what do we need Him to do for us? Or maybe we should reverse this and ask, what do we need to do for Christ? We can show our love, we can laugh and be filled with joy because death is dead, or we can hide and be afraid. This is our choice. But, let us remember also what Jesus said to the disciples, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven." Jesus told the disciples their next task- to forgive others.

Are we willing to do this? Are we ready to do this? Do we believe or are we like Thomas and needing to see Jesus ourselves? Do we really believe and do we show it?

As we consider God's gifts and blessings to us we must give thanks to God for Jesus. Jesus fulfilled prophecy and he fulfilled the promise God made to save his people. Through Christ's death and resurrection we are forgiven but we must believe. And as Jesus said to Thomas, blessed are those who believe without seeing- those who believe through faith.

This is the hope we have in Christ Jesus. This is why we can be joyful in difficult times because we are not alone. Christ is with us. The Spirit is upon us and we are able to live in faith each day. This is the hope we have in Jesus the Risen Christ. Let us rejoice and be glad.

PRAYER God of grace and hope, bless us with your presence as we celebrate Christ's resurrection. May Christ's peace be upon us always as we share Christ's joy with others. Hear our prayers O God , we ask in the name of Jesus our Saviour. Amen.