

EASTER TWO, YEAR A, APRIL 16, 2023

Welcome to the Second Sunday of Easter. There's no question that we know how to do Easter as an event. The real question is how are we at Easter as a way of life? It's all too easy when the lilies fade and the chocolate gets eaten to make Easter a Sunday to remember instead of a truth to live.

It is easy to settle for observing the resurrection rather than hold out for participating in it. If it's any consolation, we're in good company. In fact, throughout this Season of Easter we will hear the stories of those who actually had the direct experience of the Risen Lord and still struggled to figure out this resurrection thing.

This morning's gospel states that the disciples were hiding out and were huddled together behind locked doors out of fear. They were fearful for their lives as they feared being rounded up and crucified too. They were fearful of this resurrection thing too because it meant living life with a different perspective. Resurrection demanded a new way of living. That's what Jesus demanded when he entered the room and "breathed on them" and the Spirit came and filled the disciples with faith rather than fear. This scene of new life and creation is found in the hymn:

Breathe on me breath of God, Fill me with life anew, That I may love the way you love, And do what you would do.

It is an old favorite hymn of many people. Think about what it means to be filled with the breath of God and to understand more fully the will of God which is one way to describe Easter as a way of life. It's a way of life to live one day at a time, one step at a time trusting that whoever we are and wherever we find ourselves on our journey of faith we never journey so far from God. It's realizing that the life giving breath of the Spirit is never beyond our reach even when we find ourselves in that place where it seems impossible to believe which is the place Thomas found himself in this morning's gospel.

Thomas has been stuck with going down in history as "Doubting Thomas" for his refusal to accept the testimony of others which in reality is his demand for his own experience of the risen Lord. But the Greek text does not say "doubt." The Greek is *pistos*, an adjective meaning "faithful" or "trustworthy." What Jesus says to Thomas is "Do not become unfaithful, but faithful." This is just what Thomas has been up to this moment throughout the Gospel of John: faithful and trustworthy to a "t"! When Lazarus was ill, and Jesus said, "Let's go to him," all the disciples but one said, "No, there are people who want to kill you!" Only Thomas, faithful and trustworthy, said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Thomas is faithful and trustworthy. Jesus knows this. We need to dispense with anything to do with "Doubting Thomas" because it is him alone among this room full of disciples who declares, "My Lord and my God."

It's always seemed a bit unfair to me how quick we are to make Thomas the poster child for faithless doubt when the rest of the bunch aren't exactly stepping up to the plate. The "faithful" disciples who've already seen Jesus once are still in the locked, upper room wondering what on earth to do next.

Now think about this for a moment. We know that Thomas wasn't there for whatever reason in that upper room. So why did he come back? If he was afraid like the others why come back? Why not stay wherever he was. But whatever reason had

taken him away from the community, he came back. And it was in the community that Jesus came to him, and went straight to Thomas – with hands outstretched – saying:

“Touch, me Thomas. Do not be faithless, but believing.” One of Thomas’ great virtues was that he absolutely refused to say that he understood what he did not understand or that he believed what he did not believe. There was an uncompromising honesty about him. He would never ignore his doubts of faith by pretending they did not exist.

Verna Dozier, the Anglican theologian, wrote “Doubt is not the opposite of faith: fear is. Thomas refused to surrender to the fear which kept the other disciples shut up in that locked room. He both ventured out and then had the courage to return to face a community which had had an experience he did not share and to be willing to insist on his own experience of God. And so for me, Thomas becomes a symbol not of faithless doubt, but of faith and courage. Courage to trust that there are no doubts so profound that God cannot answer and to believe that Jesus cares enough to show up a second time or a third time or an umpteenth time to breathe that breath of life on Thomas – and on us.

Breathe on me breath of God until my heart is pure. Until my will is one with yours, to do and to endure.

As we celebrate and journey into this Easter season, we do so with the awesome privilege and responsibility of being the church in the world that means being the hands and feet of Jesus on earth. It is being the place where those who come seeking the risen Christ can share their doubts and seek that breath of new life that God offers all creation so we can all seek participation in the resurrection.

Even when it seems that even God cannot breathe new life into the challenge of the death of a dream or the death of a loved one - even then God responds.

There is a poster that reads:

I was regretting the past and fearing the future. Suddenly, God was speaking: My name is I AM. I waited. God continued. “When you live in the past with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. My name is not I WAS. When you live in the future, with its problems and fears, it is hard. My name is not I WILL BE. When you live in the moment, it is not hard. I am here. My name is I AM.

To live in the moment neither regretting the past nor fearing the future is where we find the life abundant God promises us. Not in the echoes of Alleluias of Easter past or in the fears of what the future holds but in the Jesus who enters wherever we are and says “Peace be with you”. Just as Jesus did to the fearful disciples locked in the upper room he gives us whatever we need to believe just as he did to Thomas. Thomas invites us to be present in the Easter moment that is not a Sunday but a way of life: a way of life that is nothing less than the Kingdom of God which is here and now.

When Jesus said, “Shalom. Peace be with you. As God sent me, so I send you,” when Jesus breathed on them and said to Thomas, “Do not become unfaithful, but faithful,” he spoke to *us* – all of us who would be disciples of his. Jesus says to us, “Help me realize my dream – God’s dream of Shalom for all creation.” This second Sunday of Easter asks us: When will we embrace the dream of God’s Shalom? When will we accept the gift of the Holy Spirit? When will we let the love of God be poured into our hearts? When will we, like Thomas, proclaim in all that we say and all that we do, “My Lord and my God!” Let there be justice and mercy for all. There is no doubt that all the

children of God, all the creatures of the Earth, and the Earth itself, await our faithful and trustworthy commitment to live in a way that is people-friendly to all of God's family, and environment-friendly as well. Jesus invites us. "Feed my sheep -- tend my lambs --take up my ministry on earth as my Body in the world" Jesus says to us. "When you live in the moment, it is not hard. I am here.

Breathe on me, breath of God So shall I never die But live with you the perfect life

Of all eternity.

Peace be with you. Jesus promises us. Thanks be to God. Happy Easter!
Alleluia. Amen