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Church of the Holy Faith
Second Sunday Easter
Acts 4:32-35, 1 John 1:1 – 2:2,
Ps 133, John 20:19-31
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Jesus Gives Us What We Need

Fireworks. Choirs of angels. A symphony orchestra. Hot air balloons. Thunder, lightning, tsunamis, and earthquakes. When the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity was raised from the dead, wouldn't you have expected a grand entrance? At least a few sparklers? Instead, Jesus chose to meet those he loved, those who were fearful he had left them forever, intimately, purposefully, and affectionately. He chose to meet them, Mary Magdalene, the disciples, and specifically the disciple Thomas, exactly where they were and with exactly with what they needed. He does the same for us today.

Jesus' post-resurrection appearances in John's gospel are reminiscent of the prophet Elijah's encounter with God in the Old Testament. Speaking against the wicked rulers Ahab and Jezebel, Elijah fled for his life. Like the disciples huddled behind locked doors, fearful of the Roman and Jewish authorities, Elijah too was fearful his allegiance to God would get him killed. Wind, earthquake and fire passed by, but God did not desert Elijah. God met Elijah, famously, in a still small voice. We see this same one-on-one intimacy in Jesus' post-resurrection encounters.

John's gospel recounts four post-resurrection appearances, three of which occurred within one week of his resurrection. Today's gospel is read every year the first Sunday after Easter and encapsulates two of the four encounters. The first appearance was to Mary Magdalene at the tomb. Although Peter and another disciple witness the empty tomb, they leave without encountering Jesus. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and is recognized when he softly speaks

her name, “Mary.” Mary Magdalene then tells the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!” While not specifically stated in John’s gospel, Luke reports that “these words seemed to them an idle tale and they did not believe them.”¹ Thus, in our passage today, we find the disciples, literally and figuratively, in the dark, the same evening Mary Magdalene proclaimed “I have seen the Lord.” When Jesus came through the locked door and stood among them, it is only *after* Jesus shows them the wounds in his side and hands that they believe he is their Lord. Sound familiar? We have spent so much time focusing on Thomas’ request to see Jesus’ wounds, falsely accusing him of being a “doubting Thomas,” that we have forgotten the only thing Thomas requests is to have the same amazing encounter with the risen Christ his friends had without him. Both Mary Magdalene’s proclamation to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!” and the disciples’ proclamation to Thomas, “We have seen the Lord!” are not all-purpose statements of Christ risen from the dead, but are personal experiences. Thomas *is* a believer, and he is also a seeker. Thomas wants to *know* God. It is his desperate desire to meet his Lord and God that compels him to request an intimate physicality: to put his finger in the mark of the nails and his hand in his side. Centuries later, Saint Augustine of Hippo would write, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”² Thomas’ heart was restless for the risen Christ.

When Thomas does encounter Jesus, Jesus doesn’t berate him or consider his request to touch outrageous. Jesus’ words are words of encouragement, not accusation: Here, here I am. Touch me. Do not be unbelieving but believing. Jesus gives Thomas what he needs. In response, Thomas makes the **ONLY** declaration of Jesus’ divinity found in John’s entire gospel: “My Lord

¹ Luke 24:11

² Augustine, *Confessions*

and my God!” Jesus’ words are words of encouragement to us as well: Here, here I am, he is saying to us. I will give you what you need. Blessed are you who have not seen and yet come to believe.

In both resurrection appearances, to the disciples and a week later when Thomas is present, Jesus greets them, “Peace be with you.” “Peace be with you,” was a common greeting in early Christian literature, but Jesus’ repetition is intentional. The disciples abandoned Jesus as soon as the soldiers approached to arrest him. Other than possibly John, none were with him at the cross. Peter vehemently denied even knowing Jesus. They are cowering behind locked doors, fearful, confused, despondent and grief-stricken. Jesus’ words of peace are meant to enable them to overcome their fear. Just as he does not reprimand Thomas, he does not reprimand the disciples for their desertion. Prior to his crucifixion, Jesus promised his disciples, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”³ In greeting them with words of peace, Jesus reminds them that he will never abandon them. When they can overcome their fear, they can move forward in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Like the disciples, the natural thing to do when we are feeling anxious or fearful is to hunker down and lock the doors. Or perhaps to binge watch Netflix. We become focused on our own security, our own small world. We try to suppress a desire to know God. But Jesus cannot be stopped by our locked doors. Jesus comes to us just as he did to Thomas and his disciples, right in the midst of our fear, our questioning, our confusion, and our seeking, saying, “Here I am. Peace be with you.”

³ John 14:27

Today's gospel is a story of hope and promise, not judgment and reprimand. It stands as a pledge and promise that even today, thousands of years after the first disciples experienced the risen Christ, the grace of God in Jesus is available to all through the work of the Holy Spirit. To all believers and all seekers. To all who are fearful and to all who want to touch. To all whose hearts are restless. This is the offer of the risen Christ. This is the power of resurrection. Amen.

Alleluia!