

Easter 2A

April 19, 2020

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

After the Pentecost event, Peter starts preaching to the crowd about Jesus

Psalm 16

1 Peter 1:3-9

God has given us a new birth into a living hope

John 20:19-31

Jesus addresses Thomas' doubts, sent them out, breathed the HS on them

(Susan Zaballos' Cross Icon)

Peter, John, and Mary Magdalene had all seen the empty tomb. Mary had talked with the angel at the tomb; and then she saw and spoke with the resurrected Jesus. He directed her to tell the disciples that he was alive and would meet them in Galilee; and that is exactly what she did. The disciples' response was to hide out together in a locked room, hoping not to be found by the Jewish leaders or the Romans; hoping not to face the same brutality that their teacher had just suffered. They were filled with fear.

Peter was no longer the rock;

James and John, nick-named Sons of Thunder had no thunder left in them.

Thomas needed more proof than just to hear from his friends that Jesus had been there. None of them believed Mary's report of his rising to life again. They had no idea what would happen next, and they felt completely powerless to do anything.

But in the events that John recorded in today's Gospel reading, everything changed. In these two appearances that Jesus made to his disciples, through locked doors, **there were three gifts that he gave them.**

These three gifts changed the lives of these men,

they changed the course of history,

and they are extremely important to you and me.

Without these gifts there would be no Church, no Christian faith. No power let loose that can change us from the inside out.

The first of these gifts is "peace". There was no peace in that room before Jesus arrived. There was lots of fear, confusion, doubt, isolation, and hopelessness; but certainly not peace. But Jesus' first words to them were, 'Peace be with you'. He was alive; and he had not come to them to vent his anger for their denial of him. He spoke love. Three times in this short passage, Jesus said 'peace be with you.'

That precious gift of peace melted the fear of Peter, later leading him to the powerful speech we heard in Acts, boldly preaching Jesus' power over death, and after that becoming the first bishop of Rome. The gift of peace erased Peter's guilt over denying Jesus, and Thomas' guilt over doubting that Jesus had risen from the dead.

This gift of peace certainly is precious for us in our fear of Covid-19, and our anxiety over the economy of our households, and of the country. Jesus taught not to worry about tomorrow, tomorrow will worry about itself. This peace isn't about being naïve. It is about recognizing that as people of faith, we can trust that God

will not waste this hurt. God will bring blessing out of it. We might not know yet what that blessing looks like.. but maybe we do.

This extended time of isolation, and fear of the Coronavirus, can lead to short tempers, sleeplessness, and feeling lethargic. But some of you are volunteering on Wednesdays at the Food Bank to prepare bags of food for distribution. Some are making phone calls every week to a list of friends, just to check in and talk for a while. Prayer needs are being shared. Some are making face masks, and offering them for free to people without them. And some are contributing their time to make sure our church and our preschool stay healthy.

I think these are powerful ways we can see the ‘peace’ that Jesus gives his people.

The second gift Jesus imparted on his disciples was “purpose”. After Jesus said, ‘peace be with you’, he said, ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’

It was a similar point he made in Matthew 22, the Great Commandment, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul. **And love your neighbors** as yourself.” That is agape love, self-less giving to each other.

It was the same point he made with the New Commandment at the Last Supper. “I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”

His disciples had a job to do. You and I have a job to do. The job is not to sit and worry. The job is to be a lamp in the world; to be a servant; to sprinkle some salt of faith in a faith-challenged culture; to help people who cannot help themselves. This is NOT the same thing as being a good person. It is choosing to do good things because we believe **that is what we were created for**, and **that is what God expects us to model** for our family and our neighborhoods. AND... it is **depending on a power greater than ourselves** to make that purpose happen.

When I talked about the gift of ‘peace,’ I listed some ways I see people helping people. Feeling God’s **peace** helps us act on our **purpose**.

The final gift Jesus imparted was power. He knew that it would take more than a 3-year ministry 2,000 years ago to produce life-changing results for the rest of time, across national borders, and into every culture. And so the one they had thought was dead, breathed on them. And the Spirit certainly did empower them out of their fear. Peter’s amazing sermon in Acts 2 converted 3,000 people with that one sermon. Peter was a rock again. These men had feared death. I expect that they also feared the luke-warm faith that seemed to be left – now that their charismatic teacher was gone. They had feared life, too – not knowing what would happen next, and assuming the worst. But Jesus changed all that, and he changes all those fears that can live in you and me.

The Resurrection appearances of Jesus brought peace, purpose, and power to his disciples, converting them into apostles: turning faltering students into bold messengers. The truth of his Resurrection was not a return to his old life; but a transformation toward the return to his divine nature as God the Son. Through his

divine nature he chooses to give those same gifts to you and me. Peter said, “Although you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him.” When I read that sentence, my thoughts went to the Good Friday services of Holy Week, just nine days ago.

This is an icon that a very talented artist in San Jose created for my parish there. My plan this year, if we had not been sheltered in place, was to use this image at the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday. At the end of the Stations, we would take this icon off the cross, hand it from person to person as we carry Jesus’ body to the tomb, and to recite prayers together from the BCP Burial Office.

When I have led that service before, I had a very hard time getting through those words of the burial office. But his crucifixion happened 2,000 years ago; and this is a painting; and I have said these words many times before;

I have not seen this man; but I believe in him; and I love him. I can’t explain that, but it is real. That is the gift we receive from the Spirit. It is new birth. It is a living hope.

It is a matter of faith working on the head AND the heart. It is recognizing that there is a power at work bigger than any power of our own. And it is recognizing that the power at work wants nothing greater than to be in caring relationship with each of us, and for us to be in a caring relationship with each other. How very important it is now, for us to believe!

From the Easter Resurrection event,
THIS is our inheritance: Peace, purpose, and power.

Amen.