

### OPENING PRAYER

We are the body of Christ.  
Whether we are gathered in one place  
Or dispersed throughout the world.  
We are the body of Christ.

### READING John 20:19-29

### REFLECTION

It seems to me that John's story of the day of resurrection can be seen as a drama with a prelude and three acts. Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early on the first day of the week. She found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Her first reaction was to run to Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved. They run ahead and find the tomb as she had described. The Gospel tells us that Peter arrives second but enters the tomb first. 'Then the other disciple who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead.' Note that they went to their homes, plural, they are scattered. After they are gone, we hear of Mary's encounter with the risen Christ. He calls her by name! She shares her experience with the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord!'

By evening some of them had gathered together...*under cover of darkness*. We find ourselves locked in a house with the disciples. Remember this is the day of resurrection. You would think that they would be dancing in the streets! But no...they are full of fear. They are still contemplating the experience of the empty tomb, still trying to understand what had happened that morning. They have heard Mary's story of seeing Jesus face to face and yet they are afraid...hiding...uncertain...they don't know what to do next. The disciple whom Jesus loved *believed but did not understand*. He did not know the whole story. One of our challenges is to put ourselves in the shoes of the disciples when we know what comes next, we understand a *bit* more. Then suddenly Jesus is standing among them. His first words are: 'Peace be with you.' He shows them his wounds. The reality of the crucifixion is not airbrushed out of the picture. *They rejoiced!* Jesus speaks the peace again and then breathes the Holy Spirit upon them, renewing, empowering, and enabling them to continue his mission in a hostile world. It is the breath of life! Jesus' words of commissioning are remarkable, even astounding...'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.' They are commissioned to be agents of reconciliation in a world that will reject them. This presents a challenge, to say the least, to a fearful and fragmented community. It presents a challenge to us in the unprecedented times we are living in today. Thomas is told of Jesus' appearance among them. 'We have seen the Lord.' I must see for myself says Thomas who has been called, unfairly in my opinion, the doubting disciple. Remember the others were a bit doubtful too! Thomas honestly expresses a deep collective uncertainty. Does he express our uncertainty too? I think so. I remember an object lesson taught at Beckminster on the Sunday after Easter in 1997. It was a lesson about seeing and believing. A certain minister walked down the aisle of the church eating a daffodil. Do any of you remember? There were those present who did not believe what they were seeing. Some thought he was eating a sugar daffodil. Some thought he had learned a magic trick and the flower had disappeared up his sleeve. No, he actually ate the daffodil. Seeing is not always believing. We try to rationalise. We try to make things fit in the world as we understand it. We leave no room for possibilities beyond our ken. I

had no trouble believing the story even if I wasn't there because I knew the minister in question would eat a daffodil to make a point. I hasten to add that you are not to try this at home. Apparently, a toxic element must be removed before the flower is consumed!

The denouement of our drama occurs a week later. The disciples are *still together in the house and the doors are shut*. We can still sense the anxiety they are experiencing. Thomas is present. Again, Jesus stands among them and says, 'Peace be with you.' He gives Thomas the opportunity to touch his wounds and encourages him to believe. Thomas responds, 'My Lord and my God.' Thomas' response is the most profound revelation of Jesus' identity in all of John's Gospel. In these five words Thomas proclaims Jesus' relationship with God. He does not need to touch Jesus. Jesus' offer of himself gives Thomas the insight he needs. Jesus' repeated 'Peace be with you.' is more than a greeting. In those words, a peace 'that passes all understanding,' a peace founded in love and fired by the Holy Spirit is poured out among the disciples. This is what will transform the scattered, fearful disciples into the men and women who spread the Gospel message.

It has been said many times that we have experienced a Holy Week and Easter like none other. Others have questioned this and asked if we have not come closer to the experience of the disciples than ever before. Instead of lamenting what could have been, let us cherish the opportunity to learn from this Easter Season like no other we have experienced. May we like the disciples *rejoice* even though it is dark and we are behind closed doors. May we too recognise the presence of the risen Lord in our midst and, like Thomas, proclaim 'My Lord and my God.'

I leave you with the prescient words of hymn writer Andrew Pratt. \*

The world is fraught with danger,  
we have no way to turn,  
when war or sickness threaten  
faith has so much to learn.  
Uncertain, lost in anger,  
frustrated, in the dark,  
unsure of any meaning,  
it seems we miss the mark.

Like Thomas we're left wanting,  
with need to know yet more,  
for all we feel is shaking  
and we are left unsure.  
A mystery awaits us,  
a vast unknowing cloud,  
with nothing safe or certain –  
a hope, or yet a shroud?

Here in the heart of hardship  
where life is dead and gone  
we sense a resurrection,  
we meet the risen one?  
One lasting fact surrounds us,  
for though our grasp is slight,  
God's love will beckon onward,  
a soft yet healing light.

## Beckminster Reflections 19 April 2020 Easter 2

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This Celtic prayer attributed to Oswald of Northumbria was posted in a prayer group set up by the daughter of a resident of the Methodist Home in Hastings I served as chaplain.

All that I am Lord, I place into your care,  
All that I do Lord, I place into your care.  
Everything I work for, I place into your care.  
Everything I hope for, I place into your care.  
The troubles that weary me, I place into your care.  
The thoughts that disturb me, I place into your care.  
Each that I pray for, I place into your care.  
Each that I care for, I place into your care. Amen

### Closing Prayer

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\*The hymn is not in *Singing the Faith* but can be found on the Singing the Faith+ website.

Rev. Peggy Heim