

Today's Gospel story is very similar to last week's reading from the Gospel of John. John tells of Jesus coming into the room with the disciples and having a conversation with Thomas, who hasn't believed what his friends have told him about Jesus. Last week, it was the story of Thomas struggling to believe. This week, we hear the story from Luke's perspective. When the disciples see Jesus, they are afraid that they are seeing a ghost. He assures them that he is not a ghost, in fact they can touch him and he even shares a meal of fish with them. Each Sunday following Easter, we will have a resurrection appearance. There is doubt, there is assurance in the real presence of Jesus, and there is renewed hope by those who witness the risen Christ.

It's hard to concentrate on, the Easter story. All of the Easter candy and decorations have been slashed to 50 or 75 percent off. All of the eggs have been hunted, and we've moved on. We're either beginning to make end of school plans or summer vacation plans. The seasons are obviously changing, everything is shifting this time of year. The build up of Lent to Easter is over. We celebrated with great joy – and what a joyous day it was! – The 50 days of Easter may not be complete, but it's time to get back to the every day. Or maybe not.

Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, has a marvelous book simply called Resurrection. His primary claim in the book is that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ created a community of people who are defined by forgiveness and God's mercy. It's easy to forget that the same people Jesus appears to following the resurrection are the people who betrayed him, abandoned him, denied him, and ran from him when he was being crucified. Yet following his resurrection, this splintered group of people are sought out by Jesus. They don't bump into each other awkwardly at the market, and make amends. Jesus looks for them and finds them. When he does, they are reconstituted – resurrected if you will - as a new community with a new covenant. They are put back together through the power of God's mercy and forgiveness, and sent out to show the world that same mercy. They are new people through God's forgiveness and mercy. As people of the risen Christ, we also identify and understand ourselves as forgiven and therefore understand our calling to be forgiving.

What this means is that Easter Sunday is just the beginning, not the final celebration. We have just begun to understand its gift.

The world we wake up to each day is so antithetical to the idea of forgiveness and mercy. Watch a political campaign where one side defines itself by berating and exposing the weaknesses and mistakes of the other. The justice system so often seems based on beating the system rather than seeking truth and justice, and mercy has been legislated out of the system with mandatory sentences, even for minors. How in this world do we live as a community of forgiven people prepared to be forgiving?

Verna Dozier, the late Episcopal theologian and lay preacher, says that a true understanding of being forgiven has personal and social implications, and it is risky. In her book *The Dream of God: A Call to Return*, she says this:

*"Faith implies risk. Kingdom of God thinking calls us to risk. We always see through a glass darkly, and that is what faith is about. I will live by the best I can discern*

*today. Tomorrow I may find out that I was wrong. Since I do not live by being right, I am not destroyed by being wrong. The God revealed in Jesus, whom I call the Christ, is a God whose forgiveness goes ahead of me, and whose love sustains me and the whole created world. That God bursts all the definitions of our small minds, all the limitations of our tired efforts, all the boundaries of our institutions."*

Dozier says, "*...I am not destroyed by being wrong. The God revealed in Jesus, whom I call the Christ, is a God whose forgiveness goes ahead of me...*" Dozier points out the absolute freedom we have as people of the Resurrection. Freedom because if we can grasp that God's grace is always offered to us, always goes in front of us – the grace to try to love, the grace to try to speak out for justice, the grace to try to discern God's movement in our lives - if we can grasp that God's grace always goes in front of us, we can conquer the fear that so often holds us back. We can dare to step into the unknown and make mistakes. Being right does not define us in God's eyes. We don't have to live perfectly.

Risking to live as forgiven people takes many forms. Risk can be subtle, such as reaching out for the hand of someone you've hurt, not knowing if your offer for reconciliation will be accepted or rejected; it can be bold, such as speaking out on behalf of those who are voiceless in our society without knowing who we may offend, or if there will be a backlash; and it can be disconcerting, not knowing if the direction we believe is of God *is* of God.

Risk implies vulnerability. Vulnerability, unfortunately often perceived as weakness, is necessary for the risky business of Christian living. "Kingdom of God thinking" accepts the possibility of something new happening in any given situation. It is the heart of living as people of the resurrection: everything that dies is born again as a new creation. An apology makes possible a new way of being in relationship with another and the possibility of living with ourselves in a new way; a voice raised for justice makes hope possible for another and strengthens our own voice; carefully listening to the urgings of God in our life can make all kinds of things possible.

Risk always feels like looking through a glass darkly. The risks we take - in earnest desire to follow the Christian way – don't always turn out the way we hoped, or even with what feels like a good outcome. That's because we aren't always right, nor are those with whom we live. But, as Dozier says, "we are not destroyed by being wrong." God's forgiveness goes before us and sustains us, and gives us the freedom to risk to love boldly. We have to stick with the Easter story beyond one Sunday to even begin to get it. Living in trust that we are forgiven people – people whose value does not rely on being right - takes a lifetime.

Amen.