

Easter 2B

John 20:19-31

7 April 2024

St. Clare's Episcopal Church

During the last year and a half, I have been enrolled in a program to become a spiritual guide (formerly known as spiritual director). Before enrolling in the program, I spoke with several others who had completed the course to make certain that I was up to the task.

The program includes practice in being a guide with two volunteers, meeting monthly on zoom with a peer group, receiving spiritual guidance myself, independent study and writing, and attending two residencies in Maryland.

I love the interactive parts of this program. What I didn't count on was the expectation that I would work independently on significant amounts of reading and writing. With knee surgery earlier this year, I got further and further behind in the reading and had no energy for writing. Consequently, I will continue in the program but will not do the work required for certification – at least not right now. There is an option to defer.

I learned something very important about myself. First, that I have limits. I know I'm stating the obvious. Secondly, that I do not learn well by independent study. I need interaction, discussion, and a more structured approach.

How do you best learn? Is it by listening and hearing? Seeing? Experiencing? Touching? Some combination of these. Remarkably, no two of us are the same in God's infinite, creative, design. What might work for one, does not work for another.

Which brings us to this morning's Gospel and Thomas. It might help to step back from the well-worn supposition that Thomas is lacking in faith – Doubting Thomas we call him.

In John's Gospel this morning, we find Jesus' disciples hiding behind closed doors. They are afraid: afraid of their leaders who want to suppress them; and maybe even afraid of Jesus. How might he respond to their disloyalty and lack of courage?

We discover immediately that Jesus, the Risen Christ offers peace – Shalom. Shalom has a deeper meaning than simply tranquility. Shalom means I desire for you a sense of holistic well-being. When Jesus comes among his friends, he leads with shalom.

He does not stop there – he breathes into them the Holy Spirit of peace, love, and forgiveness. This Risen Christ breathes on them. Now, Jesus will work in, around and through them to continue the work of Shalom.

Brimming with love and joy, they go to tell Thomas that they have seen Jesus. As we know, Thomas is not buying it. Hearing this from his friends, friends who, like himself, recently proved to be unreliable followers of Jesus, Thomas, a visual and tactile learner, must see and touch for himself.

When Jesus visits them a second time, he invites Thomas to come close – to touch and see his wounds – and when Thomas does this, he makes a confession of faith, “My Lord and My God.” Jesus meets Thomas right where he is and gives him what he needs for faith. This is, of course, true for the others as well. It is not that the other disciples have faith and Thomas doesn’t. The faith of the other disciples comes from God; it is pure gift.

Thomas request serves as a help for first century Christians who did not have the blessing of seeing and touching in person. Those reading John’s Gospel, written at the end of the first century, are likely as scared and confused as the disciples in the upper room.

These followers have no Temple. Their families and communities are dispersed. The Romans want to obliterate these Jewish Christians – they are disruptive to Roman Order.

These early Christians find in Thomas, a helpful ally. When Thomas sees and touches, they too can see and touch. And they can know that, in the midst of chaos, God will meet them where they are and breathe into them the Spirit that loves and liberates through them.

And so it is with us – 21st Century followers of the Way. Jesus meets us where we are and when we are disinclined to participate, Jesus waits for us until we are ready.

Ready to open ourselves to the breath of the Holy Spirit which flows in, around, and through us. The reading from the Acts of the Apostles this morning shows us a community where the Holy Spirit flows freely and generously.

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.” In other words, no one had to do without.

God meets us where we are; gives us what we need – whether or not we know we need it – and empowers us through the Holy Spirit to do our part in making Christ’s love an deep reality where believers are of one heart and share what they have.