

Easter 1B 11/04/ 2021

John 20:19-30

There is a cartoon that shows a large door, locked three times with heavy bolts. A sturdy chain reinforces the bolts and just to make sure that nothing can invade this formidable fortress, a long bar is securely fastened across the doorpost. Yet, upon close examination, it is clear that someone has managed to slip a valentine card under the door.

Easter is the valentine that God slips under the locked doors of our world. No matter how hard we try to keep God's power and promise out of our lives, persistently and gracefully God reaches us anyhow. John's appearance stories begin with the disciples behind closed doors, trembling, cowering, grieving, and running away from the possibility and the promise of Easter morning. The text makes clear that the doors were locked for fear of the Jews. I wonder: What were they really afraid of?

Were the disciples afraid of death or were they afraid of life — this new, strange, demanding life that a resurrected Lord might demand of them? Now John makes it clear that Jesus "appeared" among the disciples. He didn't bother to pull back the bar or unhook the chain or painstakingly turn the three bolts on the door. Instead he just appeared. Whatever the resurrection of the body means, it certainly means the resurrection of the recognisable power, the recognisable love, the recognisable essence of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and the book of Acts all suggest that the ascension of Jesus happened forty days after Easter — followed by Pentecost ten days later. Here in John, Easter and Ascension and Pentecost all happen at the same time. The particular breath of Jesus is breathed collectively into the disciples. Why? So that as a community they might become the risen body of Christ. The resurrection of Christ is for the purpose of new creation, a re-creation after death, but also re-creation before death. It is about the creation of the Christian church, so that through the power and ministry of our life together, we might become God's continuing presence resurrecting the world. Perhaps equating new life [only] with a life after death experience has been a way for the contemporary church to avoid our responsibility for new life now — here in our personal lives, as well as in the life of the world.

This wonderful picture of Jesus breathing on the disciples is reminiscent of the Genesis creation story where God breathes life into Adam and Eve. Then there is that amazing vision in the book of Ezekiel, where the valley of dry bones all of a sudden comes alive. Breath animates the bones — they rattle, clang, dance, and rise up — coming together, covered with flesh, sinew, and muscle becoming a resurrected community of God's hopeful people. "Receive the Holy Spirit," Jesus says to the disciples locked in the upper room. "Receive the Holy Spirit," Jesus says to us, locked here in our doubt, fear, and faintheartedness. "Receive the power of life, the gift of grace, the spirit of partnership and discipleship," Jesus says, "so that you can become co-creators with me in God's world."

What a gift and what a responsibility! The book of Acts makes it clear that resurrection is experienced most powerfully in community, and it describes for us what one of the early communities looked like and felt like. It was a community of celebration, thanksgiving, awe — the poor, the widow, the immigrant, the alienated and excluded joined together with the privileged of society who had allowed themselves to be changed. They lived together, engaging in teaching, fellowship, worship, and acts of caring. With mutual love and affection, they intertwined their lives willingly and enthusiastically to embody resurrection and the scriptures attest that "day by day the

Lord added to their number.” Is this how the Christian church out there, the Christian church right here, is reacting to the astounding, amazing grace of Easter?

The Dutch word for resurrection is *opstanding*, which literally means to stand up, to take a stand. To be “religious,” to be pious, to be holy — at least within the Christian context — does not mean to withdraw into a private world of feel good faith. It means to stand up to the powers and principalities that bring death to the world. It means to take a stand for the poor and the powerless. It means to stand up against pain, controlling possessiveness, and pride. Yes, to be a part of the resurrected community means to be for life, not just against death.

As Easter people we have a choice. We can go from this place, standing up to the powers and principalities that bring death to this church, this community and this world. We can go from this place, using the resurrection power that has been breathed into this community. We can go from this place, thankfully and passionately bringing new life to God’s fragile world. Or we can do nothing. What will our choice be? May it be life giving, for you and for me and for others?

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