

4.7.2024 Easter 2

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Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

“Believe and walk in the light”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

On the first Easter day, filled with fear, the disciples were locked in a room without the light of life and hope. Yet Jesus came and stood among them. We might imagine, like many locked rooms, the windows were also closed against the light of the sun. Yet Jesus the light of the world, sought his disciples out in their fear. Jesus breathed the life-giving Holy Spirit upon them, renewing them with a faith to go and tell others.

The fear and anxiety of the disciples must have been tremendous. They had heard the women’s testimony that Jesus was risen, and yet the doors were locked; they were anxious and afraid. Jesus stood amid their fear and said, “*Peace be with you.*” He showed them his hands and side, and again said, “*Peace be with you.*” In a room without hope, Jesus breathed upon them, saying, “*Receive the Holy Spirit,*” giving them the breath of life and hope in his resurrection. From now on, every breath and every word they would speak would be his.

In a world in need of forgiveness, Jesus gave them the power to forgive. This power to forgive was the same forgiveness he had spoken from the cross, “*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*” Jesus retained no sins at his cross. Even if his disciples retained the sins of any, they would do so in the hope that one day even those sins could also be forgiven. By breathing on them, Jesus forgave them, giving them new work, saying, “*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*” They would be his messengers in this world.

The risen Jesus had not returned for revenge or retribution against those who had denied, crucified, or abandoned him; rather, Jesus came with peace, new life, and forgiveness.

That locked room was a microcosm of this world where over and over people are locked into rooms of fear, anxiety, and doubt about the future. Like the disciples’ locked room, this world is perishing as peoples and nations are closed in upon themselves in fear, hatred, and war. Like Jesus’ words, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,*” we, like the disciples, are to be his messengers of hope and forgiveness *that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life.*

Yet Thomas was absent, and Jesus returned to meet Thomas in his doubts and fears. If Jesus had met his disciples as a group, he now met Thomas, as he meets each of us, as individuals

who have our own doubts and fears.

In the encounter with Thomas, we also hear the promise that people would believe without seeing. Jesus is already looking with hope into the future of his church where people like us, and like so many around the world hear the good news in their own languages and believe without seeing. Believing without seeing is the powerful reality of Easter. Faith is how we see. Faith is another way of knowing that gives us courage to act in this world with hope.

This Easter, Jesus continues to come to us and this world, saying, *“Peace be with you. Do not doubt but believe.”* Jesus knows this world is in need of the light of hope. Jesus knows this world is in need of his breath of life. He seeks us out each day with grace.

We live in a nation and a world increasingly closed in upon itself. This year it is again the season of Easter, and yet we see it around us – people and nations locked into rooms of anxiety and fear. Humanity is increasingly surrounded by fear, hatred, and death. Despite all the chocolate bunnies and colorful eggs of Easter, the world seems to have forgotten a love and forgiveness so powerful that it gives light, hope, and new life.

Again at Easter, we find our world in fear of the Other, the stranger, and the foreigner – all for whom Jesus Christ also died and lives. Across the world nations and peoples are locked into rooms of fearful nationalism that leads to doubt and mistrust, to war, famine, and hopelessness. Who will save this world from our sinful neglect of one another?

At Easter, Jesus comes to us again this year with peace and words of forgiveness. Again and again, he breathes the Holy Spirit upon us that we might use our breath to speak his words of life to this world. Christians are not and cannot be about revenge or retribution. By his cross and resurrection, we are forgiven and sent as messengers of hope and life into this world. He sends us in his place into this world to be his light and life to all who live without hope and in constant fear.

Like Thomas, have you ever changed your mind about something or someone and believed anew? Have you ever been freed by forgiving or by being forgiven? Christians are people of hope, joy, and forgiveness. Christians are generous to others because they know the generous Easter forgiveness and love of Jesus.

Today’s epistle, 1 John, gives a powerful witness about the Easter light of Jesus, proclaiming, *“God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.”* The Easter light of Christ allows us to see ourselves, others, and this world with hope.

We cannot claim to walk in his light or to believe in the God whom we have not seen while also saying we hate our sister, brother, or neighbor. He is light and his light gives hope to this whole world that God so loves. He is the atoning sacrifice not only for you, but for the whole world – for people you may never know and for those whom you may not particularly like.

He is also our advocate with the Father, yet we live in a world where we constantly hear other voices and advocates of hate, mistrust, division. Christ is your advocate so that you might be his advocates of hope and forgiveness in this world.

Jesus lives in you so that you might believe and walk in his light. Do not doubt but believe: *In him there is no darkness at all*. His light will radiate light through you upon this world.

Believe and walk in his light. Do not let anyone lock you into a room of fear about others. Resist those who advocate division and fear; resist the lie of hate that others are different, that others have no value, that others must be excluded or rejected. Jesus was raised for all people.

Do not doubt but believe. In an unforgiving world, forgive others. In a divided world, offer peace to your neighbor; in a world of enemies, live as a friend, offer your friend Jesus to all whom you meet.

*In him there is no darkness at all*. Be his light. Work for peace, resist fear, and offer forgiveness.

Believe and walk in his light. Amen.