

Sermon by Lex Breckinridge – April 19, 2020

Easter 2

John 20: 19-31

Have you had the blues recently? It's going around these days, I'm told. In fact, I woke up yesterday morning with a mild case of the blues. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but something was a little off. If we had a cat, I would have barked at the cat. If we had a dog, I would have hissed at the dog. If we had a parrot, I would have yelled at the parrot to shut up. I was just out of sorts.

Now, it took me about a minute and a half to diagnose the cause of my blues. I was blue because I was missing things. Like a haircut, for instance. As you can see, I really need one. Zonnie told me not to trust her with a pair of scissors; I'm glad she said it before I had to. So, yeah, I really want a haircut. And, I wanted to end our afternoon hike yesterday with a beer at the Chainline Brewery in Kirkland instead of just heading back home. As you can see, I was a little petulant, sort of like my 3-year old grandson. You know, "I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it."

On a deeper level though, I realize what I am really missing is you, yes, you. I'm missing your faces and your voices and your laughter and your warmth and your energy. I love our musician friends gathered behind me this morning, but I also want the other 30 of you back here. I want to share the sacrament with you. I want to be at coffee hour with you. I want to pray with you. I want to laugh with you. All of which is to say that I realized yesterday morning that I'm missing community. I'm missing my St Thomas community. I'm missing my family community. I'm missing my friend community. I'm missing the warmth and the mess of being close to my fellow human beings.

The cure for that yesterday morning blues was to Facetime with our New Orleans kids. When we called, they were having lunch in their backyard on a beautiful spring Saturday. The grandkids had some silly questions to ask us, and Alex and Kirsten and Zonnie and I had some wonderful grownup conversation that had nothing to do with viruses or lockdowns or politics. It was just what I needed to boot the blues out the back door.

I'm realizing in all this that I have a fervent desire. My fervent desire is for things to return to "normal," for things to return to the *known*, the *expected*, the *unsurprising*. But while this is my fervent desire, my guess is that's not really happening. We are in unknown territory, and the old, the familiar, the routine is not our current reality and probably won't be our new reality. What our new reality will look like, we can't yet say, and we certainly can't control it, as much as we wish we could. But here we are in Easter. And I do believe that in this Easter season, we are offered hope. And with hope, we can embrace the new, embrace the different, embrace the unexpected with the promise the Resurrection offers us.

So, let's talk about the Resurrection. All the resurrection appearance stories share one detail in common. When the Risen Lord first appears to the disciples, his most intimate friends, the ones who had known him best, they at first didn't recognize him. That's right. In some way that's not described in these stories, but which is made very clear, Jesus' appearance had changed. Mary Magdalene at first mistook

him for the gardener. Two dusty travelers who had apparently known Jesus well were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus on Easter evening and found themselves accompanied by a stranger whom they at first did not recognize, but who later turned out to be the Risen Lord. Peter and his friends spent a night fishing when a stranger came up to them on the beach in the morning and, like the travelers to Emmaus, they at first didn't recognize Jesus. The "normal," the expected, the familiar was no more. The Risen Lord, it seems, brings with him the unfamiliar, the unexpected. Their lives would never be the same. There was no going back. From now on, in the midst of the unfamiliar and the unexpected, these frightened friends of Jesus were to be not only *followers* of the Word, they were to be *doers* of the Word. And although, they couldn't exactly see what the future would hold, they went out with hope for that unknown future, and inspired with confidence by the power of the Risen Lord's appearance and presence in their lives, they changed the world.

Now, there is another detail that is critically important for us to understand. And this detail is particularly meaningful in these days

when we and all creation feel wounded. Let's turn to this morning's gospel reading to see what I mean. The day after Easter, the day after Mary Magdalene had announced to them that she had seen and spoken with the Risen Lord, the disciples, apparently not yet believing this amazing story, are gathered in a house behind locked doors because they fear arrest by the religious authorities. A figure mysteriously appears and stands among them. He speaks a word of peace, but it's not until he shows them his wounded hands and his wounded side that they recognize him.

Now Thomas, our patron saint, didn't happen to be there that evening. He couldn't believe it when he was told what they had seen. "Unless I see and touch those wounds in his hands and his side, I won't believe it," he says. And then, a week later, they gather again, and this time Thomas is present. Jesus again mysteriously appears. "Put your finger here and see my hands," he says to Thomas. "Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

Take a look at the beautiful Caravaggio painting on the cover of your worship sheet. Thomas places his hand deeply into the wound in Jesus' side. You can see the lightbulb coming on. He gets it. When he sees the wounds and touches the wounds, he finally gets it. "My Lord and my God," he exclaims.

Now, our patron is often referred to as Doubting Thomas, and that's an important part of the story. But what I want to draw our attention to this morning isn't Thomas. It's Jesus. The Christ. The Risen One. The new reality of Jesus' resurrected life included his wounds. The resurrection, the new life, the new world it opens up isn't possible without Jesus' wounds. We would expect his wounds to disappear, or at least look like they had been healed, but that apparently is not how resurrection is going to work. In fact, if you think about it, it's *only* at the place of the *wound itself* that healing can happen. His wounds, our wounds, are important, it seems. The place of brokenness becomes the place of greatest strength.

How many times in your life have you wanted to run away from your wounds, forget them, wish them away? How often have you been ashamed of the broken parts of your life? How often have you tried to ignore the wounded part of our society, our culture and all of creation? For me, my honest answer is plenty of times. There are plenty of times when I want to forget my wounds and the wounds of the world, run away from them, wish they never happened. Yet, it's in our woundedness that we are most vulnerable. And, it's in that vulnerability, that humility, that we are finally open enough to change. It's in our woundedness, in our vulnerability, that we are open wide enough to allow God to come in, to allow God to transform us, to allow God's Reality to be our reality. Of course, it's always this way whether we like it or not. It's just one of the great paradoxes of faith that the wounds in our lives are also the places of our greatest strength.

It's remarkable, I think, that this pandemic we are living in is happening in the seasons of Lent and Easter. Lent is that season of humility, of vulnerability, where we are invited to let go of our

attachments to our false gods, the gods of success and money and comfort that numb us to reality. That letting go, if we really do it, can be scary and can feel like death. But, that's not the end of the story. Easter comes right behind Lent. Death isn't the end of the story.

As we look around us in these days, it's not just we who are wounded. In a very profound way, all of creation is wounded. I think we all know this. And I want to say that it is this very woundedness that will also be the place of our healing. My dear sisters and brothers, there's no going back. It's hard to fathom how things can ever be exactly as they were, and that's a good thing. That's the power of the Resurrection. Things were never again exactly as they had been for the disciples, those intimate friends of Jesus. They lost Jesus forever in one way but gained him in an infinitely more profound way in what became their new reality, and the way of life for all of us.

There is resurrection, there is new life, happening all around us. This is our opportunity, our sacred opportunity, to live into this New Reality. To bring into this New Reality what works for us and let go of

what hasn't worked for us. It's become so apparent that we care deeply about one another. We have been smiling at one another, greeting one another, reaching out to one another with offers of help and with vulnerable requests for help. Now, life is slower and that's a good thing. We can choose to spend more and better time with our families, more and better time with our friends, more time building relationships and making new friends, more time in prayer. We can make different and healthier choices on where we put our resources. We can, these days, see a lot more clearly what's important and what's not.

We are all suffering in one way or another. Those who have lost loved ones to this damned virus, those who have lost jobs or have had wages cut because of this damned virus, those whose plans and dreams have been put on hold or dashed because of this damned virus, those who are isolated or lonely or in despair because of this damned virus, all feel the suffering in the most profound way. It all seems absurd and tragic and unjust. Yet, if we can see these wounds, these deep wounds, as the way forward towards transformation, as Jesus did, they can

become sacred wounds, not something to be denied or avoided or projected on to other people. Jesus, the Risen Lord, teaches us that God uses tragedy and pain – and wounds – to bring us into a Larger Life, a deeper identity in union with God.

Earlier in John's gospel, Jesus said "... unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." The grain of wheat must fall to the earth and die before it can bear fruit. In the divine economy, everything can be used, everything can be transformed, nothing is wasted. But we usually can't see this until after it's happened. It's only in hindsight that the New Reality makes sense.

So, in this season of Resurrection, the season where God is using our wounds to transform us, I pray that I might have the courage and the grace to trust in hope that God's purpose for me, for you, for all creation is being worked out. Like Thomas, I want to let go of doubt and believe. I want to say, with Thomas, and with all my heart, "My Lord and my God."