

Sermon, Second Sunday of Easter 2022, St. David's Episcopal Church (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

Last Sunday, I preached about how confusing that first Easter was, with the women not understanding what had happened when they got to the empty tomb, and the disciples not believing what the women told them. In fact, when the risen Lord visits them, they were locked inside because they were afraid.

Because of the way the Gospel is worded, I need to make a little disclaimer here. This year we used a different Good Friday reading than we normally do in order to avoid John's Gospel, which often speaks disparagingly about "the Jews." There are four different accounts of Good Friday, so it was easy to replace one with another.

There's only one account of the disciple Thomas, however, and so-called Doubting Thomas is always the reading for the second Sunday of Easter, but it only shows up in John, the same Gospel with sometimes uses unfortunate language, and you may have noticed that that happens in today's reading. The text reads that the doors were locked "for fear of the Jews." John's Gospel was written later than the other three gospels, at a time when the sect that became Christianity was in conflict with some other Jewish groups, so unfortunately, the term "Jew" was used disparagingly when referring to only a certain set of people.

Tragically, the word "Jew" in this passage and others in the Gospel of John has led to antisemitism. Remember, our lord and savior Jesus Christ was a Jew, as were Mary Magdalene and the male disciples. The ugly way that the word is tossed around in the Gospel of John has led to violence over the years, which would horrify the author had he known.

So these Jewish disciples were locked inside because they were scared, because their Jewish leader had been crucified by Rome just days before, and while the women told them he was risen, they did not believe it. They worried someone had done something terrible with his body, and that as his followers, they were in mortal danger. They did not believe Mary Magdalene that he was risen. At least, not until they saw him themselves, that night—all of them except Thomas. Jesus showed them his hands and his side, and then, we heard: then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. The same thing happened the next week when Thomas also saw him in person.

Thomas is often maligned as "Doubting Thomas," but all of the disciples experienced doubt. Doubt is a part of faith. More problematic than doubt is fear, and we heard that the eleven were locked inside out of fear, but Thomas was not with them. We can assume that Thomas was not allowing fear to control his movements and was out doing something for the group.

Last Sunday, I talked about how sometimes we aren't sure when it's time to celebrate. When we see the empty tomb? When we hear the news from some strange men in dazzling white? When we see the wounds for ourselves and know the story is true? Here, when Jesus was with them in person, the disciples saw him in the flesh and knew that *now* was time to celebrate. To rejoice. Hallelujah, they may have said, much like we use extra alleluias during the fifty-day season of Easter.

Our psalm today begins and ends with Hallelujah. Praise God in the holy temple, and for mighty acts, and with various instruments and dancing: let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

In this fifty-day season of Easter, we are praising with all of our breath. Today we get to baptize a baby: our first baptism since January 2020. Last week I might have wondered aloud when we would know that it is time to celebrate, and today we know, for sure: *now*. Now is time to celebrate. Maxwell is joining the Christian family. After two years of too many services that weren't in person, we are back in the baptism business, making holy water and sharing it with young disciples.

What kind of Christian will Maxwell grow up to be? Will he hide in fear like the eleven, or will he go out and proclaim the gospel like Mary Magdalene? When he experiences doubt, will he run towards it like Peter did on that first Easter morning, or will he calmly seek more answers like Thomas did? Probably he will respond in a mixture of all of these ways, like the rest of us. None of us get our faith right all the time—or wrong all the time. We are all beautiful and we are all flawed, all of us who breathe. Today we can rejoice together about the times we get it right.

Jesus instructs his disciples to receive the Holy Spirit as he breathes on them. Breath shows up in both the psalm and the Gospel today. Breath shows up all the way back in the creation story in Genesis, when God created Adam from dust and breathed life into him.

Let everything with breath bless the Lord!

Today we will invoke the Spirit as we baptize Maxwell, and he will be sealed by the Holy Spirit. Another translation for the biblical Hebrew word “Spirit” is “Breath.” Baptism breathes new life into us: a life in Christ. When we create holy water together, for the first time since January 2020, we will remember the Holy Spirit moving over water in the beginning of creation. We will thank God for the water of baptism, through which we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. We will ask God to sanctify the water the power of the Holy Spirit, and after the baptism, we will ask God to sustain Maxwell in God's Holy Spirit.

And, being a baby, it's possible that Maxwell will use some of his breath to make a joyful noise, or to express confusion about why a stranger is pouring water on him. This is a very Christian response, so don't be alarmed.

Today's psalm is the culmination of the book of psalms. This prayer book that our Jewish Jesus would have used ended in praise. While the first Sunday of Easter might have been confusing, this second Sunday of Easter, we know that it is time to celebrate.

Hallelujah.