

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER: YEAR A

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Psalm 16

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

APRIL 16, 2023

St. David's Episcopal

N. Chesterfield, VA

Ruth Partlow

WHEN I TURNING 12, MY FATHER RETIRED AND MY PARENTS DECIDED TO PULL UP STAKES AND MOVE TO FLORIDA. I WAS THE LAST ONE AT HOME SO IT SEEMED LOGICAL TO MY PARENTS. BUT FOR ME IT WAS THE HARDEST THING I'D HAD TO DO IN MY YOUNG LIFE. THOSE ADOLESCENT YEARS BETWEEN 11 AND 14 CAN BE CHALLENGING AND DIFFICULT FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED. I WAS CHANGING IN SO MANY WAYS AND AS I SHIFTED FROM CHILDHOOD TO YOUNG ADULTHOOD. THE MOVE FROM MISSOURI TO FLORIDA JUST MADE IT HARDER..

LOOKING BACK NOW, I REALIZE I CAME THROUGH THAT TRANSITION JUST FINE.. IT WAS PAINFUL AND HARD THOSE FIRST COUPLE OF YEARS A NEW PLACE, A NEW TOWN, A NEW SCHOOL, THE CHALLENGE OF FINDING PEOPLE TO TALK TO AND MAKE NEW FRIENDS. IN THE MIDST OF THIS I FELT LONELY, LEFT OUT AND SEVENTH GRADER AWKWARD, UGLY AND UNATTRACTIVE AS I NAVIGATED THE COMBINED JUNIOR HIGH-HIGH SCHOOL'S HALLS.

I FELT OVERWHELMED.I SHED A LOT OF TEARS THAT YEAR! I FELT A LOT OF ANGER AND FRUSTRATION. IT FELT AS IF I WAS ON THE OUTSIDE OF EVERYTHING. MY CLASSMATES HAD ALL BEEN TOGETHER IN THE SAME ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SINCE THE FIRST GRADE. HERE I WAS – ALMOST TWELVE, AWKWARD, SHY, CHUBBY, AND TOTALLY OUT OF MY ELEMENT. I FELT LIKE THOMAS – JUST OUT OF IT -- LEFT OUT – PITTIED – BECAUSE HE MISSED SEEING JESUS ON THE EVENING OF THE RESURRECTION. I COULD REALLY EMPATHIZE WITH HIM..

HOW DO YOU THINK THOMAS FELT WHEN HE REALIZED HE'S MISSED SEEING JESUS THAT EVENING?ES HAD SEEN JESUS ON THE EVENING OF THE RESURRECTION?

WHERE WAS HE? WHY WASN'T HE PRESENT THAT EVENING? WAS HE TRYING TO GET BACK TO NORMAL AFTER JOY OF FOLLOWING JESUS ALL THOSE MONTHS?

WAS HE HAVING DINNER WITH HIS FAMILY ONCE AGAIN?

DID HE HAVE TO GO TO A JOB?

OR, WAS HE SO UPSET THAT HE SIMPLY WANTED TO BE ALONE ?

—WHERE WAS THOMAS?

I IMAGINE THOMAS REGRETTED NOT BEING WITH THE DISCIPLES THAT EVENING OF THE RESURRECTION. WE KNOW HE WANTED PROOF! – SEE JESUS'S HANDS, HIS SIDE – THE NAIL HOLES. MAYBE THOMAS QUESTIONED THE INTEGRITY OF THE DISCIPLES – WERE THEY TRICKING HIM? WAS THIS APPEARANCE OF JESUS REAL? SURELY IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN A FIGMENT OF THEIR IMAGINATIONS – NOT ALL OF THEM.

WHAT DID IT MEAN WHEN JESUS BREATHED ON THEM AND SAID, “RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT?” WERE THE DISCIPLES SOMEHOW SET APART? INFUSED WITH GOD'S SPECIAL SPIRIT? WOULD HE, THOMAS, BE GIVEN THIS HOLY SPIRIT TOO? OR BY HIS ABSENCE WAS HE DEEMED UNWORTHY, UNDESERVING?

THOMAS MIGHT HAVE FELT ENVIOUS, FELT LEFT OUT AND EXCLUDED. WHY HADN'T JESUS FOUND HIM THAT EVENING TOO? APPEARED TO HIM? BREATHED THE HOLY SPIRIT INTO HIM? AFTER ALL JESUS HAD MADE A SPECIAL POINT TO APPEAR TO HIS BELOVED DISCIPLE MARY MAGDALENE EARLIER IN THE DAY. WHY NOT HIM?

WHAT WAS IT LIKE FOR THOMAS TO BE WITH THE DISCIPLES, WITH MARY MAGDALENE AND HEAR THEM TALK ABOUT SEEING JESUS ALIVE, PRESENT? HOW DID IT MAKE HIM FEEL – TO HEAR THIS TALK, TO HEAR IT OVER ? HIS ENTERING THE LOCKED ROOM --- NO WALLS OR DOOR IMPEDED HIS ENTRANCE! SAYING “PEACE BE WITH YOU AND BREATHING THE HOLY SPIRIT ON THEM. HAD HE MISSED OUT ON THE HOLY SPIRIT?

AND, MARY MAGDALENE TELLING OF HER ENCOUNTER NEAR THE EMPTY TOMB – MEETING THE GARDENER. HOW, ONLY WHEN HE SPOKE HER NAME, “MARY”, DID SHE RECOGNIZE JESUS. HE COULDN’T IMAGINE HOW JESUS JUST APPEARED –FIRST TO MARY, THEN TO THE DISCIPLES.

IT MUST HAVE BEEN HARD NOT TO FEEL LEFT OUT – OR

– FORGOTTEN AND UNIMPORTANT?

OR, MAYBE THOMAS WAS ABLE TO SIMPLY REJOICE TO KNOWING THAT MARY MAGDALENE AND THE OTHER DISCIPLES HAD TRULY SEEN JESUS. YET, BEING A PRAGMATIST, HE WANTED CONCRETE PROOF – TO SEE THE NAIL HOLES, TO KNOW THIS WAS REALLY THE REAL JESUS WHO HAD BEEN NAILED TO THE CROSS AND DIED THERE. HE WANTED TO BE SURE – VERY SURE.

I EMPATHIZE WITH THOMAS. I WOULD HAVE BEEN FEELING LEFT OUT AND WANTING TO SEE, TO HAVE CONCRETE PROOF! HOW MANY OF US – WHEN IT COME TO JESUS WANT CONCRETE PROOF TOO? ARE YOU SKEPTICAL WHEN SOME TELLS ABOUT AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD, WITH JESUS OR HAD AN OVERWHELMING EXPERIENCE OF THE HOLY?

I CONFESS I ENVY THOSE WHO HAD SUCH A CONCRETE MOMENT WITH GOD, IN CHRIST OR WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT. MOST OF OUR LIVES WE ARE SIMPLY CALLED TO HAVE FAITH, TO WALK THROUGH LIFE KNOWING THAT GOD IS PRESENT AND WORKING IN OUR LIVES. TO KNOW WE ARE NEVER ALONE.

WE MAY HAVE THOSE SPECIAL MOMENTS WHEN WE KNOW FOR CERTAIN – THAT WE KNOW BECAUSE WE KNOW GOD IS WORKING IN AND THROUGH US. BUT OFTEN WE’RE CALLED TO SIMPLY WALK BY FAITH, TRUSTING THAT GOD IS ALWAYS PRESENT, TRUSTING THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS AT WORK MOLDING US AND GUIDING US THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES.

WE HEAR THIS GOSPEL EVERY YEAR ON THE SUNDAY AFTER EASTER. I BELIEVE IT TELLS US AT LEAST THREE THINGS:

FIRST, HIS WORDS, “PEACE BE WITH YOU” ARE AN ASSURANCE THAT WE ARE NEVER ALONE AND ARE ALWAYS LOVED AND FORGIVEN. HIS PEACE, GOD’S PEACE IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE TO US AND WITH US.

SECONDLY, HE INVITES SKEPTICS LIKE THOMAS, LIKE ME, AND LIKE SOME OF US TO TOUCH HIS SIDE, HIS HANDS AND FEET – TO SEE THE MARK OF THE NAILS AND OTHER WOUNDS, REMINDING US WITH HIS WORDS OF LOVE AND ENCOURAGEMENT, “DO NOT DOUBT, BUT BELIEVE.”

WHEN THOMAS HEARS THESE WORDS, I IMAGINE THOMAS FALLING ON HIS KNEES AS HE UTTERS HIS AFFIRMATION OF JESUS, “MY LORD AND MY GOD!. THIS ACCOUNT REMINDS US TO TRUST GOD AND BELIEVE.

AND FINALLY, IT IS A REMINDER TO EVERY GENERATION OF BELIEVERS – THAT “BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN AND YET COME TO BELIEVE.” THAT’S FOR US, ALL OF US! IT’S NOT ABOUT PROOF – TOUCHING THE WOUNDS OF JESUS. IT’S ABOUT FAITH – ABOUT TRUST – ABOUT BELIEVING IN GOD. BELIEVING GOD IS TRUE AND DOES NOT DECEIVE.

THIS GOSPEL IS A YEARLY REMINDER – TO ALL WHO CALL THEMSELVES CHRISTIAN, WHETHER THEY ARE REGULAR ATTENDERS OR C& E CHRISTIANS, SHOWING UP ON CHRISTMAS AND EASTER, THAT GOD IN CHRIST IS ALIVE, WORKING IN AND THROUGH US EVERY DAY. IT’S FOR ALL OF US FROM THE FAITHFUL, STRONG BELIEVER, --TO THE SKEPTIC, -- THE DOUBTER, -- OR EVEN THAT LONELY 12 YEAR OLD SO LONG AGO IN FLORIDA, IT’S AN INVITATION:

TO TRUST GOD’S LOVE,

TO KNOW GOD’S PURPOSES ARE BEING WORKED OUT,

TO BE ASSURED THAT ALL THINGS WILL BE WELL. ..

IT'S A CALL EVEN IN THE MIDST OF QUESTIONS, BELIEVE.

EVEN WHEN WE DOUBT, BELIEVE.

EVEN WHEN WE HAVE A FIRM, STRONG FAITH: BELIEVE!

GOD IN CHRIST IS WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU ARE.

TRUST AND BELIEVE.

WE NEVER WALK ALONE.

“ “BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN AND YET COME TO BELIEVE.”