

TEN POINTS (more or less) ABOUT EASTER FROM ST. JOHNS GOSPEL

What follows are some notes from my sermon of Easter 2 – I enjoyed preaching it and some of you enjoyed hearing it. Maybe some readers will appreciate these notes also. Most of the ideas are not mine, but were collected from various sources. What is interesting to me is that they all can be related to the Gospel of John for the day –

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Accounts of Jesus' Resurrection in the various Gospels give us insight into the beliefs and experiences of the first Christians as their hearts were changed by the Risen Lord and they began to live as "Easter people." Here are 10 points that we can see in the Gospel of John which might help us experience the power of the Resurrection in our lives.

#1 – The Resurrection takes a while to sink in, but the community continues. The disciples were still shut away behind locked doors, even though they had met the Risen Jesus. It took them a while to "get it." But God is patient and persistent. Jesus doesn't move on to someplace and someone else; he keeps on coming.

#2 – Jesus' ministry to the disciples and to the church is peace and forgiveness. Over and over, Jesus says "Peace be with you." (Note that the "Peace" in our weekly liturgy recalls this greeting of Jesus, and our commitment to a ministry of peace to one another.)

#3 – Doubting is OK. Questioning and asking for evidence is not a *denial* of faith but a *path* to faith. Through his doubting (and maybe because of it) Thomas is led to make his extraordinary confession of faith: "My Lord and my God."

#4 – Thomas is welcome in the community, despite the fact that he questions the other disciples' experience. He is not shunned or excluded. The disciples behave like Jesus: peace and forgiveness.

#5 – Evidence is not as important as encounter and experience. Thomas demands evidence, but when Jesus offers it, Thomas doesn't need it. Experiencing Jesus' power and presence, love and forgiveness is enough.

#6 – The Resurrection happens in community. This is not a "Jesus and me alone" relationship. No one in the Gospel sees the Risen Lord without sharing that experience, and most often the Risen Jesus appears to groups of his friends.

#7 – Wounds are important. The Christian faith is not “God will make everything happy and well.” It is rather that God acts in spite of and in the midst of wounds, suffering and trouble, for Jesus and for us.

#8 – The Holy Spirit is given to us by the Risen Lord. The same Spirit that moved in the beginning of creation, that God breathed into Adam and Eve, that animated the dry bones in Ezekiel’s vision, is given to us. We can’t live as Christians on our own – God gives us Resurrection Spirit.

#9 – The Risen Jesus sends us out in mission. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And he gives us the power to give his peace, forgiveness and love. We live in partnership with Jesus, sharing Jesus’ teaching, miracles and work. The Church (us!) is God’s gift to the world.

#10 – The bonus information:

“Easter” – comes from a Germanic pagan spring festival; the Church is skilled at “baptizing” pagan customs.

What was Jesus doing on Saturday before Easter? – preaching to those who had died before he came. See 1Peter 3. “The Harrowing of Hell”

And, talk about reordering of the economy – see the Acts of the Apostles.

“Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. ... There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”