

The Second Sunday of Easter (2018)

John 20:19–31 *On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”*

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, 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 in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, 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; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

In the Name of Jesus.

How has the grave lost its sting, dear children of God? The Breath of Jesus tells us: ‘As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you! Whose sins Y’ALL forgive, they are FORGIVEN!’

The poor grave! It had a good run! All scary and dark—and in my little experience, it shakes the sandcastles and figments of security with which we have surrounded ourselves; shakes them to the core: toys, pennies, boasts, volume! As my unbelieving and perishing brother likes to say to me, ‘The same thing is waiting for you and me, buddy: six feet of dirt and a shovel!’

No argument here! But it is dirt hallowed and cleansed by the rest of our Lord in the ground. And as the poet sings:

Death, and darkness, get you packing;
Nothing now to man is lacking.
All your triumphs now are ended,
And what Adam marred, is mended;
Graves are beds now for the weary,
Death, a nap, to wake more merry!

‘The disciples were overjoyed to see the Lord—His hands with those marks, His side with that gash.’ Why? For the Lamb of God had INDEED taken away the sins of the world! And now that Lamb, that Man, those Hands and that Side are risen—and BURSTING to breathe out peace and forgiveness, His Spirit: Holy.

The Gospel according to Saint John is very tactile,

flesh and blood real. From the ‘Word made flesh’ to the water and blood gushing from the Lord’s pierced side, this Man Whom Thomas hails as Lord, as GOD, has now—somehow!—CHANGED the UNCHANGEABLE One! NOT just that God the Spirit—Who needs no eyes to see, no ears to hear, NOW has eyes and ears, hands and feet and two sides to Him!—

But as the apostle wrote: ‘The LAW came through Moses; GRACE and TRUTH came through Jesus Christ!’

That is NOT two things, by the way: grace and truth. It’s a way of speaking like when we say our coffee is ‘good and hot!’ It means it is just the right hot temp! Grace and truth means what’s solid about God, what we can count on: is the God we do not deserve. No! The God we do not NEED...TO...DESERVE!

(I’m just gonna soak that in for a second. Feel free!)
 ‘The Father we see when we see Jesus; the Spirit Who IS the Breath of THAT...MAN—is the Maker we have hated, but Who is nothing but ATTACHMENT to us now in Christ! And we need never DESERVE Him!’

This means, of course, that all the world gets to learn all over again all about LOVE! UTTERLY unlike what all men call love—moth to flame, steel to magnet, eyes

chasing lusts—BIBLICAL LOVE is ‘attachment,’ an ‘adherence’ toward God or man, in accord with the Only WILL there is: His!

This is what got His enemies’ feet stomping, as our Lord found His way to the cross and laid down His life. For if there is one thing that men HATE more than following the Will of ANOTHER—THE...OTHER!: Moses’ God—

Men hate utterly MORE the Free, Calming Breath of God found ONLY in the Flesh of That One Man, now risen from the dead! For the worst of all houses of straw and sticks we little pigs build to keep out the wolf is the DELUSION that the LAW has SCARED anyone of us INTO God’s will MORE, compared to the next man.

Want proof? Listen to yourself! Your conversations; your heart; your racing thoughts! Y’all are not THAT much better than your poor shepherd here!

Any day there are any number of flesh and blood sinners for whom Christ died and rose that we want KNOWN, EXPOSED, EXAMINED—as being—ADMIT it, Christians!—

People ARE what YOU AND I would just NEVER...BE, aren't they?!

People DO what YOU AND I would just NEVER...DO, don't they?!

That is what you said to people on the phone yesterday!

That is what distracted your devotions this week!

And that MUST be the reason that poor Thomas needed to see the same joyful sight that the others saw: The Lord Whom WE will be overjoyed to see too, with those hands and that side, those Wounds!

Thomas must have been what Dr. Luther calls a 'real, hardboiled sinner!' The GRAVE and it's butler, death, had done their job well with Thomas. He KNEW that he, Thomas, did NOT deserve his Maker's attachment of love. No doubt he was as afraid as the others, with the doors locked, for FEAR of the superior, their betters, those who made them look even WORSE than they felt: the Jews.

There is NOTHING...AT...ALL wrong with wanting to see the very FLESH that achieved our forgiveness and God's love! WE will see Him—soon; soon!

What drives our Lord and our God to act like Moses—don't you think it's cute, the way Jesus Christ tries to get all scary and upsetting like the Law-giver?! He tries! Let's not make fun of Him! But let's not FALL for it!

His chiding of Thomas—'Do not be unbelieving, but believing!'—

Poor Jesus! He's stuck! Just as Saint Luke has to keep pointing to men dropping their most common idol—money!—to show that the TRUE God is somewhere in their lives!—

So, poor Jesus knows that we only FOR CERTAIN respond TO...THE...LAW! And so, He puts on that mask—but means nothing but pardon and Spirit and peace and freedom!

Stop being THAT and start being THIS!

He can bark all day long! I've tried it at the cemetery

and in sad hospital rooms. I can call out to the dead to wake up all I want: they just don't have it in them!

The Breath of Jesus that speaks WHOLENESS, Peace with God and the world now, ORDERS us to give up the religion OF...ORDERS!

He CONDEMNS any approach to God that hints of CONDEMNATION!

You and I CANNOT be joyful, TRUST in the witness of the risen Lord, if YOU...AND...I...CONTRIBUTE...ANY...THING!

With Thomas: eyes to inspect, fingers to stick in, hands to thrust!

'But, Jesus: what will I have to DO with my life, if I give up meddling with and trying to fiddle with all the other lives around ME?!

The Only One Who knows what He's talking about teaches us: Howzabout rising from the dead?! What WE call life is death; when all OUR probings DIE, we have LIFE! We have Him!

Whatcha pay for the water with which you were baptized? It FALLS from the sky, from heaven, without charge! THERE is a gift of the Holy Spirit on which to count, to trust in, from which to live!

The ONLY thing that upset Jesus that day with Thomas—the ONLY thing that can grieve the Holy Spirit from That Man's lungs!—is to put a price tag on free gifts.

Thomas HAD the witness of the others, the Word of Peace and the Spirit's forgiveness. But Thomas wanted to take hold of the wind that blows where it will.

See the heights to which our Savior has raised US!

God the Spirit, Who needs no eyes to see, no ears to hear, now has eyes and ears and the rest of the package.

You and I, UTTERLY ATTACHED, in LOVE with OUR investigative tools—eyes, ears, brains, mouths, hands, ugh!—

You and I, flesh and blood, are now translated by the

Gospel, our Baptism, and Christ's Absolution, to the realm of the Holy Spirit!

Meaning, without any man deserving God's love, or our own, that man HAS us: our prayers, our attachment, our life!

And every idolatrous THING to which you and I so desperately cling, to DISTINGUISH ourselves from everyone, from anyone—

Can all go to the grave, die; in fact, MUST! Praise the Lord!

So that what springs to life is not the law, but the Gospel; not OUR deeds, but His; not what WE deserve, but what HE deserves; not OUR hot, puffing breath and blowing, stormy boasts—

But the gentle Spirit unlike any other; from His lips, to us, to GIVE...US...PEACE in the Name of Jesus! Amen.