

Easter 2B, April 19, 2009

Lections: Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20: 19-31

Today we have what could be called a station of the resurrection, a pause in the Jesus journey, a glimpse of the disciples' response to a new reality. Every year on this 'low' Sunday (which usually means that the attendance is low after the high numbers of Easter), we are invited to look at a community in grief, fearful, behind closed doors. We are given an opportunity to focus on Thomas who wanted to feel, to touch, to experience for himself what others in his circle had claimed. He wanted some real sense of the risen-ness of Jesus. His need is our need but he has been shamed for it. I am sure you noticed the critique in the gospel. (My hunch is that all of the original witnesses to the resurrection had died by the time this gospel was written so that a believing without seeing was the norm.)

We have called Thomas the doubter and forgotten the strength of his witness in other areas of scripture: when, after Lazarus emerged from the tomb he called his friends to go with Jesus to Jerusalem and die with him; when he asked Jesus how they could know the way. We have forgotten that the other disciples who had an experience of the risen Christ a week prior to this new vision of Jesus with Thomas present, were still behind closed doors, still fearful. Clearly they were grieving and not knowing how to go to the next place whatever that might be; they were unsure of the path.

When my father died I was 14. He had died at home while I was at school, his body removed before I came through the door. He was where I found easy laughter and great adventures. At the funeral home I was sent into the room where his body lay in its casket. Alone and frightened I had no idea what to do: was I to touch him? Kiss him goodbye as I had done every day before I went my way in the world? I had no idea what was next and the words of the funeral service washed over me, giving little comfort and not much to hold onto since I don't remember any part of it. I do remember the grave at Arlington National Cemetery, the horses, the caisson, the trumpet taps.

The community in Acts shows us how the disciples learned to live, to breathe over those in need, sharing what they had. They became, like Barnabas, those who encouraged others. They touched the wounds of need with faith in the Risen One. They made new connections. As a community of witness they moved out of hiding and helped others see their belief. They breathed in the Spirit of God and released it as Jesus had done for them.

I believe that there is something important in this station of resurrection, in a risen Christ showing wounds. I am not sure that we are told that wounds are present in other resurrection appearances. Somehow, for John's gospel, this touching of wounds is a part of the resurrection. This is a way to learn about rising to new life. Sins will be forgiven; peace-making and peace-giving are a bridge of reconciliation.

This week I have seen at least three risings emerging from touching wounds. I am sure there were more but these are the ones I noticed.

On Thursday the bishops of the Anglican Church and the Lutheran Church in this area formally inaugurated and blessed a common ministry for the Barhaven area. A Lutheran pastor, the Rev. Ann Salmon, and an Anglican priest, the Rev. David Seltzer, are walking together in a new direction. This radical welcome of full communion and community bridges the wounds of past denominational separatism, a legacy of several hundred years. We are breathing in a new spirit.

On Friday evening at St. John's, Elgin Street, a gay couple's civil marriage was celebrated by several hundred people within a festival Eucharist. The woundings of unequal rites and discrimination were touched by a community of witness, joyful in its celebration of new life. A palpable rising of spirit and a sigh of relief made the hard journey of many years worth the effort.

Earlier on Friday afternoon I had the privilege of sitting with the family and friends of Sandra Matthews whose death came after a long wounding by the disease ALS. Touching, feeling, experiencing the care of those who loved her throughout this hardest part of her journey is a part of the resurrection story. One family member was reluctant to come to church today, fearing that she could not handle the sorrow, the wounds of this dying so painful. I observed that I had learned how often at wakes and funerals, those in grief were touched, held, comforted and the wounds of loss begin to heal in the care and concern of others who wish to be a part of the new story of life beyond loss. That is what Love does in the face of loss – it helps us breathe in new life for the next steps.

The isolation of a 14 year old, the need of a disciple like Thomas, the power of a risen faith to touch and heal wounds are what we proclaim today. There are other wounds as well that need our hands – the wounds of the Earth, the wounds of culture and difference, the wounds of poverty and isolation. We need the breath of a risen Christ to live out the faith we profess. We walk by faith **and** we walk by sight, by heart, by experience. May we become the community we are called to be.

“Put your hand, Thomas, on the crawling head of a child imprisoned in a cot in Romania.  
Place your fingers, Thomas, on the list of those who have disappeared in Chile.  
Stroke the cheek, Thomas, of the little girl sold into slavery in Thailand.  
Touch, Thomas, the gaping wounds of my world.  
Feel, Thomas, the primal wound of all people.  
Reach out your hands, Thomas, and place them at the side of the poor.  
Grasp my hands, Thomas, and believe, when you feel me in the world's pain,  
And the world's glory.”<sup>1</sup>

Amen+  
The Rev. Dr. Linda Privitera

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<sup>1</sup> Kate McIlhagga, *Human Rites: Worship Resources for an Age of Change*, 1995.