

Sermon for Easter 2, April 19, 2020, St. Andrew's, Des Moines © Ron Danielson

Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

It is Easter evening. The Lord had risen in the morning. This should be a time for celebration and rejoicing for the disciples. Instead, they are locked in a room, except for Thomas (presumably he is at home sheltering-in-place).

Even though Peter and the beloved disciple (presumably John) have seen the empty tomb.

Even though Mary has spoken to Jesus that morning.

Even though Jesus had told them earlier in the Gospel that he would “not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you”.

Someone must have stolen the body; Mary must be delusional in her mourning.

So there they are – locked in a room, mourning their loss, and fearful of losing their lives.

Then suddenly the room grew still, there was a slight breeze and Jesus appeared through the locked door. He is not angry; he doesn't ask why they abandoned him; simply and softly he says: Peace be with you. He shows them his wounds and they rejoice at his presence. He says to them again. Peace be with you, and then gives them the great commission: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you”.

Then Jesus breathes on the disciples. In my mind, I see this as a wind covering the Disciples as Jesus says, “Receive the Holy Spirit”. Now defining the Holy Spirit is way above my spiritual pay grade. I will leave that to Steve and the other Biblical scholars we are blessed to have in our community. Earlier in John's Gospel Jesus tells the Disciples that God will give them another Advocate to be with us forever. Jesus says this advocate is “the spirit of truth” and that this Spirit “abides with you and will be in you”.

And then there is poor Thomas – stuck throughout history as the doubter. We never hear of “Denying Peter” or “Judas the Rat” – just “Doubting Thomas”. Yet his reaction was not much different than any of ours might have been. When the disciples told him they had seen Jesus his reaction was, “Yeah, right – show me; you guys have led me astray before. It ain't happenin' until I see it.”

A week later, while they were all gathered again in the room – Jesus appears again and shows Thomas his wounds and Thomas simply says, “My Lord and my God” – referencing Jesus and God as the same for the first time. And Jesus tells him: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe”. That is you and me he is talking about, and that is asking a lot of us – to believe without seeing.

The beauty of this story is that God is not angry with our doubt. He understands. I grew up in a fundamentalist evangelical church. There was no “doubt” in that church – only fear. What we were told is what we believed – otherwise we were bound for hell. Almost everything was a sin (my dad lost his job as Sunday school superintendent because we bought a TV set; swimming was frowned upon because you showed too much of your body; dancing was forbidden, etc.) I went to church five or six times a week and went home every time scared to death I was going to hell. God was an angry, punishing God. Doubt itself was a sin. Well, suddenly at the age of 12 or 13 I began to doubt. I spent the next 20 or so years of my life as an agnostic not wanting to deal with this angry God.

Frankly, the Episcopal Church changed my thinking. I came to this church because I wanted to marry Kathie. She was Catholic and the Catholic Church had some real problems with the fact I had divorced earlier in my life. I knew Fr. Kem from the outside world and he agreed to marry us. I had never been to church here or for that matter anywhere since I was a teen, and we began coming regularly for the next several months before the wedding. What I found really surprised me – a welcoming community without judgement. A spiritual arena where God's love was the center. What I hadn't realized from the time we started at St. Andrew's was that I was being encompassed by the wonderful wind of the Holy Spirit and was developing faith and trust in God.

Remember that while Thomas was the Gospel's main example of doubt, the other Disciples also doubted until they saw Jesus. And like the Disciples, in this place I began to hear the words "peace be with you" and I was touched by the wind of the Holy Spirit – God's advocate for those of us who have not seen Jesus in the flesh.

God uses the wind a lot to move us – the wind in the creation, the wind in the reassembling of the dry bones, the wind that parted the Red Sea. We go from doubt and fear to trust, to step-by-step, day-by-day action with faith.

We are living through a moment in time when doubt and fear are our constant companions. We can move from doubt to trust and hope with the knowledge that God is always here even though we cannot see him. My morning prayers every morning include asking for the strength to listen to God, to give me the words and actions to get me through the day, knowing that His will is better than mine. I wait and listen each day for that wind of the Holy Spirit to give me the peace that He has promised us all. To paraphrase the song: We can fly higher than an eagle 'cause he is the wind beneath my wings.