

## Easter 2A 2023

In the book of Acts, Luke contrasts David and Jesus.

He explains that David, a king and a prophet, pointed *towards* life, *towards* the messiah who was to come, but was not our model of behavior.

He was not the one who brought life.

If nothing else, David's having Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, killed in order to take her as his eighth wife indicates this.

Jesus, on the other hand, was true to the gospel that he taught.

He showed us how to live, how to bear responsibility, how to die.

He taught us how to be honest with ourselves, how to hold onto joy even as we face life's challenges, how to relate to our fellow brothers and sisters who are going through their own challenges.

When all his disciples except Thomas are behind locked doors for fear of reprisal by those who had crucified their rabbi, the resurrected Jesus appears to them.

Why did Jesus not wait?

Surely one who can walk through walls also knew that Thomas would not be there.

Luke tells us the answer.

The disciples were afraid.

Jesus did not want to wait to encourage them.

He did not want to wait to remind them that those who crucify have *earthly* power, the power to punish, but we all have the power of life.

As Matthew tells us, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”

Jesus did not let fear stop him from living out his truth, from reaching out to others.

Even when he was before Herod and Pilate and Caiaphas, he continued to witness to the integrity and humility of God, yet his *disciples* are now holed up in fear behind locked doors.

He seeks to lead them out of their paralysis by breathing on them the breath of *life*, the breath that God breathed into us at creation.

That is his way of telling them that they are not to cower, but to *live*.

They have the power of forgiveness, which is the power to build relationships and the power to refuse relationships.

Notice, for example, that the resurrected Jesus only appears to those who love him.

There is no record of his haunting those who used him to preserve or to increase their power.

Forgiveness is really just an embrace offered to everyone who sincerely wants it, but those enamored of earthly power do not reach out and take it.

In the long term, this is a much greater power than that of those who have earthly power over us.

They can injure the body, but we can build relationship with God, a relationship that never ends.

The disciples, perhaps all of whom eventually were martyred except John, who was exiled to Patmos, maintain a relationship with God to this day, but I am not sure where Pilate and Herod and Caiaphas are by this point, though it seems unlikely that they were basking in the warmth of God anytime soon.

So Jesus could not wait to share this encouraging message with the disciples and delivered it before Thomas arrived.

In addition, Thomas' absence gave Jesus an opportunity.

God works in clever and interesting ways.

The other disciples had seen Jesus and believed, but Thomas had not, so he refused to believe until, like them, he, too, had seen Jesus.

What does Jesus do for Thomas who wants to be in relationship with him?

He comes back and gives him exactly what he needs.

He appears again and lets Thomas place his finger in the nail wounds in his hands and his hand in the spear wound in his side.

Jesus is sharing his woundedness with Thomas.

Such intimacy and trust!

Nothing creates a stronger bond than sharing woundedness.

It is what keeps soldiers closely bound for decades, for example.

This, Jesus is demonstrating, is how one builds relationship, by being vulnerable with others.

He comes back to share his wounds with Thomas.

Notice that he does not breathe on him.

At this point, that would be superfluous.

Unlike the others, you see, Thomas was not afraid.

Perhaps this is why he was not hiding with the them in the first place.

He was, after all, the one who said of Lazarus that he was ready to die with him.

Now, in the presence of the risen Jesus, Thomas has fully accepted Jesus' invitation to share an intimate moment.

From the perspective of those who like earthly power, people such as Jesus and Thomas seem weak.

Pontius Pilate, for example, did not want to appear weak in the eyes of the emperor, so he refused to stop the crucifixion even though, in his own words, he had the power to do so.

Those who are sensitive and caring, on the other hand, recognize that people like Pilate and Herod and Caiaphas are, in fact the weak ones.

They live in fear, and that is exactly what the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples to end.

For the same reason, when angels appear, the first thing they say is “Fear not.”

Fear arises, you see, when we focus narrowly on ourselves.

It disappears when we see the bigger picture of our connectedness.

The opposite of fear is faith, when we are focused on our relationships with those in whom we have faith.

The resurrected Jesus is offering us love, hope, a life of connection without fear.

We just need to reach out and accept it.

This is what we practice when we take communion.

It is the humble acceptance of the gift of love.

At Easter, when there are many present who are not as familiar with the church, when people come, that is, who are looking for a nostalgic, feel good experience, I notice that some of them seize the host between their fingers.

This is just one more act of acquisitiveness, like all the rest of life, a fearful grabbing at something rather than a humble acceptance of what is lovingly offered to us all.

They do not realize, yet, that what we do here is different.

That’s OK.

They nevertheless may sense that there is something here, something more, something different, come back, and fall into community with the rest of us.

We, in the meantime, will be relishing the real presence of Christ here among us, celebrating love without condition, a wonderful freedom from fear and shame and guilt.