

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Savior.

Now, do you happen to remember how the Gospel reading began last week on Easter Sunday. In case you do not, let me remind you. It began: “After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.” Now -- do you happen to recall how the first verse of our Gospel reading today began? It said: “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.” I think it is very important for you to understand that these two verses are referring to the very same day, the same first day of the week. In other words, two very different events occurring on the same day, one in the morning and one in the evening. So here is another trick question. Do you remember what I said last week about what Jesus might have done after the resurrection until Jesus greeted the two Marys? Well, just in case, I copied those words on my computer from last week’s homily and they were: “I suggest to you that this is because Jesus, the life, was already out living it up. Can you see Jesus glorying in the beauty of an early morning sunrise? I can. In fact, I imagine Jesus sitting on a rock, a tree stump, or maybe even a bench, by the beach, just taking in the rays of light and the fresh smells of morning and thinking what an absolutely wonderful world we made God.”

Now, I am pretty sure you can guess my next question. What do you think Jesus did the rest of the day, you know, between the event at the tomb and the event in the upper room? Do you think it is possible that Jesus went for a walk, had a meal, and did a little conversing about current events? Well, I am here to tell you that is exactly what Jesus did, at least according to the Gospel of Luke. Now this is actually the gospel reading for next week but it clearly establishes that Jesus’ talk, walk, and eating on the road to Emmaus with these two other followers of Jesus did, in fact, occur on the same first day of the week as Jesus’ resurrection and appearance later to the disciples behind the locked door of the upper room. I would hazard a guess that Jesus did in fact have a pretty active, busy, maybe even lively first day of the rest of Jesus’ life. Do you think that we can do the same?

But before I delve deeper into the gospel lesson, I want to extract a little from the beginning and a little more from the end of our Psalm today. The psalmist begins the psalm by saying “Protect me, O God, for I take refuge in you.” And then the psalmist closes the psalm by saying “For you will not abandon me to the grave, nor let your holy one see the pit. You will show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, and in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Do you take refuge in God? Do you see yourself as a holy one and seek the path of life and joy in the presence of God? If so, is that not a truly freeing experience? If not, why not?

How often have you heard preachers talk about Thomas, sometimes also known as “Doubting Thomas?” In reality, Thomas has a minor, almost a bit, role in this story today. After all, what does this story indirectly say about the manly disciples who are so afraid that they cannot be seen going to the tomb and they are, in fact, hiding behind a locked door in the upper room, that same very special upper room. So, as is often the case, it is the women who take

their chances by risking to go to the tomb, maybe to do what women are always expected to do, or maybe just to see if what Jesus said would really be true.

Did you notice that when Jesus came on the scene, the fear of the disciples fell away and was replaced with joy. David Lose suggests that that is how we normally assume faith should work, but I am pretty sure that you know the true value of assumptions. We also know that that is not how it worked for Thomas. Thomas doubted. Thomas questioned. Thomas even disbelieved. And Thomas was not satisfied with second hand reports. But then again, I think the most important part of Thomas' role in this story is, in fact, Jesus' simple statement to Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." In case you have doubts or are wondering, my friends; you, we, I are those who are blessed because we have not seen, yet we believe.

By the way, have you ever thought about why Thomas was not there the first time Jesus appeared to the disciples? Is it possible that Thomas was already out and about, attempting to get on with the rest of his life, to live in the here and now? So, the women begin to get on with their lives after the resurrection. So does Jesus. And maybe so does Thomas. Is there a pattern here that we need to be cognizant of? I think so.

Karoline Lewis in her commentary on today's gospel reading focused on the words beginning the last verse of the reading, verse 31, which says: "But these are written so that you may come to believe." She goes on to point out that many theologians and biblical editors consider these words to be the purpose of John's Gospel. Karoline then goes on to point out that these words have a greater impact even than that, that they are, in fact, a summary of the purpose of all scripture. Everything that is recorded that God and Jesus have done and that God and Jesus have said is to foster belief in us. To ensure to us the belief that God and Jesus do, in fact, care for us and desire relationship with us. If that is the case, then the two questions we must answer are; first, do we believe this, and second, are we willing to have relationship with God and Jesus? If so, what does that relationship look like and how does it work?

Well, for the record, Karoline goes into a great deal of language and scripture analysis to answer those questions. I am only, however, going to summarize a part of her discussion. She says that when John said, "so that you may believe," John meant so that you might enter into or be assured of your relationship with Jesus. Belief in John, she says, is never a noun, but always a verb. In other words, she is saying that believing in Jesus is to be in relationship with Jesus.

Let me give you an idea why that is important. In our gospel reading today there is a simple, four word phrase that appears twice, albeit a week apart. This phrase is: "Peace be with you." Now this phrase and many others with similar meaning such as "do not be afraid" appear many times, over and over throughout the Bible but most especially in the gospels. The simple explanation is that belief in, relationship with, Jesus should take fear out of our lives. That means that the absence of fear takes adherence to the law, and persecution, and many other similar things out of our lives. When those things do surface, it simply means that our human, sinful self is rearing its ugly head and we need to return to focusing on our relationship, our belief.

Hear then the good news:

For many Christians, resurrection is a stamp of salvific security, not a vision of relationship and community here.

But it does not seem possible to me that resurrection could only be about eternal life in the future, it was not for Jesus nor for Lazarus.

Resurrection is not some sort of lofty yet abstract heavenly promise.

Resurrection is the promise of abundant life with God – forever AND now.

That is salvation for John – relationship with Jesus, with God, here and now.

Resurrection is relationship.

Do you believe?

Are you in?

Chad Bird wrote: *“The Gospel proclaims that we are, because of Christ, let off scot-free. The attachment of ankle monitors is not part of the post-baptismal rite. You’re washed. You’re forgiven. You’re free. No law condemns you. No celestial finger is wagging at you. You walk in the liberation of the Spirit, who lives in you, is active in you, and works relentlessly to mute the voices of guilt that still growl inside you. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Relish your freedom in the Gospel.”*

L.R.Knost, is the author of many books about raising children. One of her many quotes is: “Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.”

That, my friends, is grace. That is our command from Jesus.

Amen