



April 19, 2020 - Rejoice With An Indescribable And Glorious Joy

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Acts 2:14a.22-32; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

According to the gospel of John, it's been a busy day for the disciples. The day starts with Mary Magdalen going to the tomb early in the morning (John 20:1-10). She finds it empty and, perplexed, runs back to report it to Peter who in turn, together with the beloved disciple, rushes over to see what's going on. When he notices the tomb is indeed empty and the linens rolled up, he believes, and together with the other disciple, returns home. Whatever Peter and the other disciple come to believe is on the account of a body-less tomb. They come to believe even without the aid of the Scriptures which, as of yet, they haven't understood. So far, no eyewitness has reported any apparition.

In the next scene, Mary is outside the empty tomb weeping (John 20:11-18). She picks in and when two angels ask her why she is weeping, she laments the disappearance of her "Lord." It is right there and then that the risen Jesus appears to her, but she does not recognize his risen form until he calls her by name.¹ She witnesses the first sighting and reports Jesus'

¹ John 10:3

words to the rest of the disciples. With today's gospel, we read of the third scene at the end of the day (John 20:19-31). The disciples, minus Thomas, are gathered together and because of their fear of the Jews, the doors are locked. A whirlwind of confusion must have overtaken the disciples. First, they have to deal with their grief at losing their teacher as a disgraced person, practically a criminal, and their discouragement over the loss of hope for the future. Then, Mary's unconfirmed rumor of the resurrection challenges their understanding of reality but fails to dispel their fear and to strengthen them in faith. Mary says Jesus appeared to her, is she credible enough to stake their lives on her word? We may imagine them spending the whole day in perplexity and bewilderment, arguing back and forth, bouncing between cynicism and unbelief. They are completely lost, nothing makes sense, and they don't know what is coming next. How can anything go back to normal after they've followed Jesus? How could they remain friends after one of them betrayed their master? Haven't they all betrayed Jesus? How can their lives ever be safe when they may be recognized and killed as disciples of this self-proclaimed "Son of God"? They are right to be scared.

Good news should ignite hope, but fear feeds their incredulity. An empty tomb isn't enough to confirm that all that Jesus promised is true. What does the resurrection mean? It means God still shows up. Who can stop God? Who can stop God's redeeming love? Jesus shows up and his first words to the

disciples are “Peace be with you.” They have no doubt about who it is: the holes in his hands and his side give him away. The peace and reassurance he offers are much needed. Wouldn’t you rejoice if, in times of terror, Jesus came to strengthen you with the gift of “Peace”? Jesus’ blessing of peace is not an empty and meaningless word. It is a defiant hope that all things will be made new in the love of Christ and that death, fear, despair, and betrayal will never have the last word.

So, they recognize him and rejoice. But that peace is not for them to keep as a jealous treasure nor is it intended for sparing the disciples the pain of the world. The peace Jesus has to offer is not intended to keep the disciples insulated from the tragedies of the world. Notice that as Jesus speaks of peace, he also at the same time shows his hands and side, sings of his total commitment to the world. They recognize the signs of the past: the love-produced wounds in the flesh of Jesus, and they rejoice as they welcome him in their midst. Is this a sign of their full acceptance in faith of their new reality in Jesus?

Jesus, then, breathes on them the Spirit of Life (just as God breathed on the first humans) and a new creation takes shape. It’s the “birth into a living hope” Peter talks about. Connected to God in the Spirit there is peace. They are sent into the world just as Jesus was. And they are to carry his ministry of reconciliation by being totally present and fully engaged,

promoting peace through the gift of forgiveness, a mission that they can accomplish only through the power of the Spirit.

Believing is not dependent on physical contact with Jesus. Even Thomas, ultimately, believes without touching Jesus' side. But coming to faith and believing means coming to know Jesus and being open to what he has to offer. This brings peace. Peace is what we get into when we get into Jesus. Receiving Jesus means receiving his message and living out of His Word. Belief doesn't need proof. But that's very difficult to do especially in a hostile social contest or at times of personal and national crisis. Unless...we find mercy in the eyes of God and are graced with the breath of Christ on us. Coming to believe more deeply that Jesus is risen and alive is the work of the Spirit within and among us. That is our only hope for a life free of fear and abundant in trust. That is our salvation and our "birth into a living hope," and that is also what causes us to "rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy." We may not see him physically, but he is the one drawing us all along into this trust of unlimited forgiveness, this joy in God's ultimate power over death, this hope in his way of humility and mercy. As 1 Peter goes on to say, it is "through him you have come to trust in God" (1:21).

Christ's peace does not dismiss our doubts and fears, nor does it ignore our failures and sins. Christ's gift of peace holds them in grace. We need the story of the fearful disciples and

Thomas' moment of inquiry as we figure out how to live as Easter people. Christ's peace acknowledges our pain, but it doesn't leave us there. Christ's resurrection means that God's love is unstoppable and is constantly making all things new. Christ's peace is the good news in the midst of the bad news; it's the resurrection message that comes to us again and again, "so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

Let us pray.

God of peace, who brought again from the grave our Lord Jesus Christ, meet us in the locked rooms of fear we find in our lives. Your love is deeper than the depths of despair, higher than any joy. Give us eyes to see the Good News around us and give us grace to bear the bad news. Breathe your living Spirit on us and raise us up to proclaim your peace and hope to a weary world. We pray these things in the name of your risen Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.