

It has been a week since we celebrated Easter. Let me ask, how many of you talked about Easter this past week? "I asked friends how their Easter was." Does that count? Um...no.

My friends go to another church, and I asked about their services, does that count? Um....no.

Honestly, I don't think I did. Why do you ask?

Well, for the Christian community Easter is the pivot, the hinge pin, the fulcrum for our existence today. Jesus, who was crucified dead, was buried. But, on Sunday....he arose to life! Do you find that to be absolutely amazing, or do you shrug it off and say, "yah, Jesus rose from the dead. Whatever."

We have two distinct scenes of the disciples that were read today. The Gospel reading happened Easter evening. The disciples and women were sheltered in place.....not for COVID19, but for fear. Thomas had gone to pick up pizza for supper, and so while he was out the risen Lord Jesus showed up. This was after the women told them they had seen the risen Lord but,,, they couldn't be bothered. So Jesus shows up, and three things happen.

First he says "Peace be with you." That's so church-y isn't it? He said, "Shalom, y'all".....which means more than peace. Shalom is a wish for your wholeness. May you be wholly-complete. Man, wouldn't that be great? I mean, how short of whole are you sheltered in place? How whole are you as you learn that loved ones have contracted COVID-19? Whole. No doubts. No fears. No squabbling. No arguing. Whole. If all of us were whole, how different would this country be? Arizona be? New Spirit be? A lot.....I think. If you were to strike up a conversation after this live-stream what would you say about your own....being whole?

Then, Jesus breathes on them... Breath is ru'ah....the Spirit of God. It seems like ages ago that governors were calling out for.....respirators. This COVID-19 virus is respiratory in nature. It makes soft, pliable lungs as rigid as glass. This is a breathing-disease....and Jesus breaths, CPR's the weary souls for new life. Jesus says "receive the Holy Spirit." Wow! Where the Holy Spirit of God breathes within us, there is hope and there is life. Now the powerful presence of God was in them NOW! Were they afraid at the beginning of this scene? Are they still? Are you?

It is still too early to risk breathing other peoples' stuff. If there is a plateau in deaths, it doesn't make everything safe, like usual again. And remember, we got into this mess because people truly "believed" a lie, that it was a hoax. My friends, hoax's don't kill thousands a day. If anything we ought to be clinging to this Easter story, and its promise of new life. Breathe, Jesus said, receive the Holy Spirit.

And since good things come in 3's, Jesus gives them this mission: As the Father has sent me....I am sending you.

Those words were engraved in marble on the pulpit at Southern Seminary. As the Father has sent me....so I am sending you. And today I think of the nurses and doctors who have left house and home and traveled across the country to work in COVID-19 hot-spots. I understand their call. I understand their heroism. I understand their hearts....to stand valiantly in ICU's and Emergency Rooms. As the Father has sent me...so I send you. It is that very powerful SPIRIT of God that enables them....I believe that.

It was Easter a week ago, and that celebration was intended to restore in you that incredible spirit of celebration. Woo-hoo...it's a celebration. Remember?

The powerful presence of God filled those disciples, and though the mission to go is not said in so many words....what we know is this: the women there believed. John believed. Peter believed. And Thomas believed. Thaddeus and Bartholomew believed. Simon the Zealot believed. Nathaniel believed.

So, a week out from Easter I think it would be a good exercise to ask you this question. What does it mean for you to believe? After all, it is a very important word in this world of faith....and it is a word we are able to insert in any sentence. But, what does it mean?

Belief is built on trust. So when Facebook assaults us every day with meme's declaring so and so is an emissary of the devil, REALLY?....that certain people truly love killing babies, REALLY?....and that if you believe a lie then that lie becomes your truth....BUT....it is still a lie, yes, REALLY! Whom do you believe?

The Easter event is the central hinge-pin to our life of faith. Do you believe it? Do you talk about it? Do you think the power of Easter needs to be a mindful experience for your every day life? I do.

Because when Thomas arrived with the pizzas...you know one of the disciples copped an attitude...I know something you don't know! We saw Jesus! Nah-nah-nah-nah-nah-nah. And Thomas said....."Fake news." But, was it? As unbelievable as it was....Thomas did not simply accept the amazing news blindly. See.....

Jesus had called his disciples around him, and every day, evening, and night that band of men and women grew to love him. He was a gentle man. He taught them the power of mercy, and the gift of peace. He led them into a life....of wholeness....shalom. He lived out that love, and he shared it with the least likely recipients....the broken and blind, whores, thieves, politicians and liars, and Roman soldiers. Didn't matter who, he loved each most.

We saw that this morning, when Thomas was there. Jesus, called him by name, and understood Thomas' question. Nothing was held back. And the writer says "Thomas believed....the beloved." A week out from Easter. Another week sheltered in place. Pray the risen Lord Jesus appear to all who cry out his name....pray the Spirit is breathed deeply through respirators....bringing health, and strength, healing and peace. It is Easter and new life is all around. Amen.

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