

April 23, 2017 Easter 2 John 20: 19-23

We've all had experiences that we clearly recall. And then we hear someone else's version and it is not at all similar to our own. In such a situation a colleague once said to me, "Why let the fact get in the way of a good story."

When faced with these discrepancies about growing up in her family, Kiki Tremaine used to say: "Oh, that must have happened when I was living next door." Some renditions stay close to the facts while others renditions focus on emotion and personal issues. The same thing is going on in our Easter stories.

On Easter Sunday we followed Matthew's account of the resurrection. In **Matthew's** gospel the empty tomb and the appearance to the two Marys, the mountainside appearance in Galilee to the disciples and the great commissioning take some unspecified number of days or weeks, and cover over 100 km distance. **Matthew's** resurrected **Jesus** is mystical or visionary with no references of any kind to signs of crucifixion, and no request for touching.

In **John's** version of Easter, the empty tomb, the initial appearance to Mary and then the disciples, the gift of the **Holy Spirit** and the great commissioning are compressed into one day, and one location, Jerusalem. In **John's** account **Jesus** shows up through closed doors complete with nail holes and a wound in his side. This resurrected Jesus is far more than a vision.

So how do we get to **John's** version? Let's recall that **John's** gospel is not history remembered. It is Mystery revealed. Mystery revealed is profoundly true but factually inaccurate. It is a story of meaning, not a detailed account of occurrence. It's night language rich with metaphor. Metaphor often speaks for paradox, expressing conflicting but true realities at the same time.

So what **John**'s gospel is saying in this story is: The resurrected **Jesus** appears, empowers and sends out his follower all at once. No half measures. No duct tape! No incubation time! This is the Mystery revealed.

To be sure we all must grow in faith and practice, however John's gospel tells us when we open your lives to the **Risen One**, we get all that we need, right on the spot. We get what we need to believe right from the start. And what we get is the *allowing love* of **Jesus' Passion** to forgive and restore one another: Even if **Thomas** doesn't quite agree.

Now, we can look at life as made up of separate, distinct, autonomous, individuals, somehow having similar, yet separate experiences. Or we can look at life as interconnected, a great web of sustaining energy and Divine presence. Each world view shapes our actions and interactions. More and more we are discovering the interconnected world view to be the better story from which to live.

Friends, I choose the second story; the story that tell us we are all so connected, so intertwined in life that any action affects countless others whether we mean to or not. We all help and hurt one another just as a condition or our existence. And because of this; everything is already and always forgiven of us by **God**.

So, to create such an intricate, interconnected and interactive world, the first condition of our creation must be forgiveness. To redeem this same interconnected and interactive world the first requirement is the *allowing love of Christ's Passion* which first and foremost offers forgiveness.

This should be obvious but somehow we seem to miss it. After all, as parents everything we do or don't do impacts our children for good or ill. We forget, that as their primary care givers they are always watching, listening, taking in what we are up to.

And yet, they find a way to forgive us, and we find a way to forgive them. Without our ability to participate in this already and always forgiveness, this redeeming forgiveness, this forgiveness of allowing love, our lives and relationships grind to a halt.

So, it is no surprise that forgiveness is front and centre in our resurrection stories. Last week Matthew's **Jesus** forgave and affirmed his disciples, "***Tell my Brothers***". This week John's **Jesus** breathes on them the **Holy Spirit** in order for his followers to continue, to carry on **God's** forgiveness from within the world. **Jesus** tells them "***When you forgive someone's sins they are gone for good. When you don't, what are you going to do with them?***"

Application for Today

Easter empowers us to forgive as **God** forgives.

Forgiveness raises up both the forgiver and the forgiven.

Application II

John 20: 24-29

Bishop Tutu often tells a joke that goes something like this: There are two Bishops standing before the altar beating their breasts with great humility, crying out, "God, I am nothing! God, I am nothing!"

Shortly, one of the lowly acolytes in the church approached and started to beat his chest, professing "God, I am nothing! God, I am nothing!"

When the Bishops hear this, one elbowed the other and said, "Look who thinks he's nothing."

Humility is a funny thing. It's hard to claim it and still possess it. In our modern times humility usually comes to us as a negative, as in humiliation, a loss of face, a painful rebuke, an embarrassing revelation.

We perceive it as a diminishment of some kind. It is something to be avoided if at all possible. And yet all authentic love is grounded in humbly, willingly giving our time, talent and treasure in aid of our loved ones, our communities, and the institutions we hold dear. We actually sacrifice for one another every day but don't recognize it as such. We hang in there whatever the cost, don't we? We aren't too proud to be part of the other's life for good or ill.

One of the biblical notions of humility was allowing, letting, deciding to endure something for someone else. We hear it in the old hymn 'Mothers of Salem'. '*Suffer little children to come unto me*'. We allow what is considered to be undignified or unacceptable to happen, and it's all right to happen. It is a letting go of judging people and situations and just accepting because it already is what it is. Or. They already are who they are.

Allowing, accepting creates the inner space, the humble place where real love can enter in. Humility is central to possessing resurrection joy. Let's see how humility works as we unpack the *allowing love of Christ's Passion* as reflected in the story of Thomas.

Thomas refused to believe his friends. Thomas rejected their heartfelt testimonies to the resurrection. And yet they continued to accept Thomas, include Thomas and excuse his rude rejection of such personal sharing. They simply suffered him; they allow him to continue with them in their fellowship.

The *allowing love of Jesus* was forged through his **Passion** experience. He humbly allowed himself to be handed over, judged, rejected and then executed. No retribution. No divine wrath. No controlling the outcome: Just the forgiveness that flows from allowing love.

This allowing love is now at work in the disciples. Thomas continued to be accepted, forgiven and embraced by his friends throughout the week, even though he couldn't see it. Sometimes we can't see it either.

So the *allowing love* of Resurrection goes the extra mile and the **Risen Jesus** comes to Thomas the next Sunday evening,

“Thomas, in your pride you need proof! There’s your proof!”

But **Jesus** continues and I hear him say,

“Look around and see the real proof! Feel the humble acceptance, the gracious forgiveness the allowing love that has been with you all week. It’s the better way to experience resurrection.”

Application for Today

Friends, you are already accepted, forgiven and embrace by the Risen Christ. Take a deep breath in... let it go.... Just see it, feel it, hear it, and live in the *joy of resurrection.*