

Easter 2 April 11 2021

I have a friend, a biblical storytelling colleague named Dennis Dewey.
Dennis was actually the first person I heard do biblical storytelling,
And it knocked my socks off -- I thought 'I could never do that'.

Dennis lives in upstate New York, and he tells a story
about when he was in university.
His friends were going to a music festival for the weekend
and they invited him to join them.
But Dennis decided to stay home and work on his school assignments.

Can you guess the Festival he missed?
Woodstock -- the greatest rock and roll festival of all time.
If Dennis had known what it was going to be, he would have gone.
But he didn't have the heads-up. And so he missed it.

I'm sure that if Thomas had known that Jesus was going to appear to them
that first Easter evening,
he'd have been there with the other disciples;
but he didn't know ;
he didn't have the heads up.
And so Thomas missed it.

None of us were there that first evening of the Resurrection
But even though we weren't there, it doesn't mean that we miss out.
We may have missed being there, but we don't miss out.

It's the evening of that same day, the first day of the week.
What a day it's been. Mary Magdalene got up early and went to the tomb.
When she saw that the stone had been removed, she went and woke up Peter and John.
They went and saw the empty tomb, and then went back home.
And then Mary came and told them she'd seen the Lord!

How can that be? When you're dead, you're dead!
The disciples are confused: Jesus was supposed to be the Messiah --
How can you have a crucified Messiah?
The disciples are afraid of the religious authorities --
they've had Jesus crucified, it could happen to them as well.
And the disciples are sad. Jesus, their beloved teacher and friend, is dead.

The doors are locked.
But into that confusion and fear and sadness, steps Jesus.
To offer life and hope and comfort.

Because that's where Jesus wants to be.
Where there's confusion or fear or sadness,
That's where Jesus wants to be.
But we need to welcome him in.

In my office I have a needlepoint.
It was made for me many years ago by a parishioner,
and it's a scene of Jesus, knocking at a door.
But there's no handle on the door
The door can only be opened from the inside.
It's from the Book of Revelation.
'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.'

The disciples are behind locked doors;
They're afraid, they're confused' they're sad.
And into their midst walks Jesus.
But they don't recognize him.
It's like earlier in the morning,
When Jesus appeared to Mary and she didn't
recognize him.
There's something different about this resurrected body of Jesus.
It's the same body but it's different.
Jesus shows them his hands and his side.
And **then** they know. They know it's Jesus,
And they rejoice.

Jesus says to them 'Peace be with you'.
This is the first gift of the resurrection.
Peace. That peace that surpasses all understanding.
That peace that is a fruit of the spirit.
That deep peace that comes from knowing we're in a loving relationship with a loving God.
That deep Shalom of God.
It's like a ripple of sand at the bottom of the ocean.
There could be great storms raging above
But at the bottom, the ripple of sand is still and undisturbed.
It's that deep peace that allows Julian of Norwich , in the midst of the plague

To proclaim 'All will be well and all will be well and all manner of things will be well.'
It's that deep peace of my cousin Tony who was 43 and dying of cancer,
leaving a 2 yr old and a 7 year old.
And the priest said to him 'don't be afraid'. And Tony said 'I'm not afraid'.

Peace - the first gift of the Resurrection.
But where shall we put it? We need to make room for peace,
Because there's some things that simply clash with peace.
Anger, resentment, selfishness - can't share the same space with peace.
We need to de-clutter; we need to let them go.
And perhaps there's decluttering we need to do in our own lives.
Maybe even in the midst of this pandemic.
We need to remember the words of the psalmist:
Be still and know that I am God.
And
Like a child upon its mother's breast, my soul is quieted within me.
We need to nurture this gift of peace Because it's not just given for us,
so that we feel good.
It's to be shared.

Jesus again says to the disciples 'Peace be with you'. And then he says
'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'
This is not a request. This is an order; a command.
'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'

You know there's times in our lives, for all of us I think
When we can't see clearly the way forward;
aren't sure what we should do.
One thing we do know clearly --
Jesus sends us to bring his peace into the world.

And then Jesus breathes on them and says
'Receive the Holy Spirit. ' This is what he'd promised
That he'd send the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth.
Jesus breathes on them and they receive his very breath.
The Hebrew word for breath is *rhua* -- it's the same word as for spirit or wind.
It's the word we hear in Genesis 2 when God forms the human
and breathes into his nostrils the breath of life
and the man becomes a living being.

It's the word we hear in Ezekiel,
when he has this vision of the valley of dry bones
And the Lord commands Ezekiel to prophesy
And the breath comes into them and they live.

The Holy Spirit -- the second gift of the Resurrection.
And it's only because we have this gift of the Holy Spirit,
That we can live out the third gift.

Forgiveness.

*If you forgive the sins of any, they're forgiven,
if you retain the sins of any they're retained.*

Forgiveness is hard.

Sometimes we don't want to forgive.

We've been so hurt, or someone we love has been so hurt,
We simply don't want to forgive.

When that happens, we need to pray for the desire to forgive.

Sometimes we need to back it up even more -- to pray for the desire,
for the desire, to forgive.

We need to back it up until we're at a place where our prayer is authentic.

This can take time -- but like water dripping on a rock wears the rock down,
over time we'll reach that place where we want to forgive.

The power and ability and grace to forgive is the third gift of the Resurrection.

It enables us to forgive others, and to forgive ourselves.

There's a difference between forgiveness and reconciliation.

Forgiveness is a spiritual act of the heart, and is always possible.

Reconciliation takes 2, and isn't always possible.

Sometimes it's forgiving ourselves that is the hardest.

'How could I have done that? How could I have been so stupid?'

Sometimes we're harder on ourselves than we'd ever be on someone else.

Peace, receive the Holy Spirit, forgive.

All of this happens and Thomas misses out on it.

Later, the disciples tell him that Jesus appeared to them,
but Thomas isn't buying it.

We refer to him as 'Doubting Thomas',

but we shouldn't be too hard on him.

Does anyone really believe in the risen Jesus,

without experiencing the risen Jesus?

A week goes by, Jesus again appears to the disciples,
And this time Thomas is with them.

Jesus says to them 'Peace be with you'.

And then he says to Thomas

'Put your finger here and see my hands.

Reach out your hand and put it in my side.

Do not doubt but believe.'

And Thomas says 'My Lord and My God'.

This is John's gospel. John begins his gospel with the words

*'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God
and the Word Was God.'*

Here at the end of the Gospel, and this is the original ending of John's gospel,
we hear that truth proclaimed on the lips of Thomas the Apostle.

'My Lord and my God'.

This is the great truth of Easter.

Jesus is Risen.

Without his Resurrection, there would be no New Testament.

Without his Resurrection we wouldn't be gathered together by Zoom this morning.

Hope and forgiveness and love are the signs of resurrection and new life.

They are signs of God.

Where you see hope in your life and in the world,
there is the Risen Lord, there is God.

Where you see forgiveness in your life and in the world,
there is the Risen Lord, there is God.

Where you see love in your life and in the world,
there is the Risen Lord, there is God.

May we join with Thomas and proclaim *'My Lord and my God.'*