

Just when you thought Easter was over...*here is more of it in the gospel reading today.* Of course, the Episcopal Church, like a number of other Christian denominations, follows a tradition whereby Easter is not only a *day*...but a *season*...of *seven weeks*. And on this *second* Sunday of Easter we always hear this same gospel reading from John. It is definitely a reading that deserves to be repeated every single year because...it is just full of wonderful and mysterious things of God. +

If you wonder *what the resurrected Jesus was like*...then this story is another one that confronts us with the *paradoxes of the risen Jesus* suddenly appearing in a locked room *and yet* also capable of being touched...of Jesus being completely well *and yet* also still bearing the wounds of his crucifixion (for at least a while). So, when we affirm the historic Christian faith in the Nicene Creed, that “We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come” then how may *our* eternal life be like *Jesus*? Will we also be embodied again...and yet not embodied in quite the same way? It is an important question. +

And then, a lot of attention is given to the issue of *belief and doubt* in this story, with almost half of it addressing the doubt of the disciple named *Thomas*. I’ve never been happy with calling him “doubting Thomas”, as if he were somehow unique among the disciples. As best we can tell, *all the disciples* questioned the news of the resurrection of Jesus until they finally experienced it. If doubt was a consistent response of the *first* disciples, then it stands to reason that questions would be quite possible for *any* disciple of *any* time.

The main reason the story of Thomas is emphasized is that it also becomes an occasion for acknowledging that, after those *first* disciples who had a *direct* experience of Jesus resurrected, that *everybody else* unto this day has come to *belief without seeing*. And that that is just as wonderful and mysterious as the first disciples *believing by seeing*. Jesus blesses us too. While we have *not* seen like they saw—there is still a true sense in which we *are* able to see...the truth of Jesus...and Easter...and Christmas...and everything in between---by an *inner seeing*...a *spiritual seeing*...as we hear these stories...and think about them and question them...and as we receive the sacraments of the church that can give us an almost visceral sense that what we believe is in fact true. +

Now, speaking of sacraments of the church, there is another part of this gospel story from John that deserves a quick mention before I stop. And it is focused in both the announcement by Jesus of “Peace be with you” and the obscure verse that says: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” This is where Catholics and Protestants have traditionally parted ways in interpretation, with the Catholic magisterium teaching that priests are *empowered to forgive or to withhold forgiveness*; whereas Protestants have said that *such forgiveness belongs only to God*. The Episcopal tradition, like we often do, says some of each: We recognize the validity of *priestly absolution*...while we also recognize that forgiveness can come from our *prayers in worship*...as well as through Christian friendship (The Book of Common Prayer, p. 446). This ministry of forgiveness is a gift from Christ and it belongs to us all in various ways.

But what I especially want you to notice from this story--and there are others like it--is that *there is something about the resurrection of Jesus in itself that opens up an abundance of forgiveness for the whole world*. There is something about Easter that is not only about resurrection from the dead but, at the same time, *a completely unexpected and uncanny announcement of God’s Peace*...to his sinful disciples and to a sinful world. “Peace be with you”—the risen Jesus repeats this over and over again, probably because no one could scarcely believe it at first. And every time Jesus appeared, no disciples even had time to ask Jesus for forgiveness—there was no confession of sin—but instead Jesus announced God’s Peace. This is why I exercise the permission granted by the prayer book to let the Confession of Sin and Absolution take a rest during the season of Easter. So that we can be, perhaps, a little bit like those first disciples...who were, for a time, left speechless before Jesus...when he would find them...and say the most unexpected and godly words imaginable: “Peace be with *you*.”