

April 16, 2023
The Second Sunday of Easter
The Rev. Keri T. Aubert
St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT

Acts 2:14a,22-32
Psalm 16
1 Peter 1:3-9
John 20:19-31

You've probably heard of the term "Myers-Briggs," shorthand for the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. My good friend who teaches psychology at the University of Vermont says it doesn't hold up to scientific scrutiny. No matter; it has been widely deployed in a variety of realms. In case you don't know, Myers-Briggs is a personality inventory that locates a person along each four personality spectra: introversion or extroversion, sensing or intuition, thinking or feeling, and judging or perceiving. Each person gets placed somewhere along each spectrum, but that subtlety gets lost by the shorthand placement in the bucket to which they are closer. It's too much to explain here, but for those of you to whom this will mean something, I will confess that I am an INTJ. Yes, I said confess, because INTJ's are not particularly popular with the other fifteen possible types. I'll add that INTJs are relatively uncommon among the general public but relatively common among engineers.

Clergy these days seem to be drawn to another personality assessment called the Enneagram. It includes nine different types. The Enneagram is way too complicated to even begin to explain here. Although I haven't done an exhaustive test, but again for those of you to whom this will mean something, I'll also confess that I'm probably an Enneagram 1. To give you an idea of what that means, a variety of one-word descriptors have been used for Enneagram 1's, including the Reformer, the Idealist, and, rather less flatteringly, the Perfectionist.

Please do not use any of this information against me. The thing is, no Myers-Briggs or Enneagram category is supposed to be either good or bad. Rather, they're supposed to be neutrally descriptive. A lot of people abhor both Myers-Briggs and the Enneagram, for reasons including an aversion to reductive labeling. I get this. But I have also found them to be sources of insight, valuable for increasing my understanding of how I occupy the world—and, perhaps more importantly, for increasing my understanding of how other people occupy the world. I think most of us tend to assume that every other person thinks and reacts and processes and *whatever* just like we do. But of course that is far from true. Every human being is in fact quite different from every other human being.

Let's talk about the Gospel. Most of the Bible readings we hear in church come up once every three years. Today offered one of the rare exceptions to that rule. More specifically, every year, on the Sunday after Easter Sunday, we hear the story of the disciples in that locked house and the gift of the Holy Spirit and the absent-then-present Thomas. It's nice that we get to hear from our patron saint every year.

To clarify the timeline, it's the day that Mary Magdalene that morning found the empty tomb and chatted with the risen Jesus. Now Jesus appears to the fearfully gathered group, not once, but twice. The first time, Thomas is absent. He is left unsatisfied.

Back to personalities, but a simpler scheme. You've heard humans sorted into optimists who see the glass-half-full and pessimists who see the glass-half-empty. I understand myself as neither optimist nor pessimist; rather, I understand myself as one who sees eight ounces of water in a sixteen-ounce glass. I have described that inclination as the engineer in me. But of course that way of seeing preceded my life as an engineer, and it continues on to this day; I suppose "engineer" is really just a label I use as shorthand for aspects of me that will extend from birth to death no matter what else I'm doing. For whatever reason, it seems to be just the way I am. Others experience it—I experience it—as sometimes useful, and sometimes annoying.

I feel a kinship with Thomas, because I imagine that he's a little like me. I get his reaction, because it would be mine. Maybe there's doubt, maybe there's jealousy. I think there's also a search for logic and precision and understanding. Thomas must also have been sometimes annoying, and sometimes useful.

A good team needs players with a variety of gifts, and a gaggle of disciples is no different. The disciple we know the most about is Simon Peter. He and Thomas could not be more different. Words that I might use for Peter include impetuous, dreamy, and changeable. A person like that is also sometimes annoying, and sometimes useful.

On the useful side, it seems to me that Peter is the one who can imagine the future, and Thomas is the one who can physically build it. Of course, as it turned out, Thomas the Twin became known as Thomas the Builder. Tradition has it that he was a builder of churches. That's why one of his symbols is a carpenter's square.

Back to that locked house. When we first peek in, Jesus is not there. Those disciples must be trying to figure out what to do next. Maybe they are thinking of returning to the relatively safe and predictable lives they had all been living before Jesus pointed at them one by one saying, "You, follow me," and one by one they actually did. But wait, now here in front of them is Jesus again, bringing his wounds and his breath and more of his cryptic words. Yes, it is really truly him. It was really truly him on the cross, and it is really truly him in that locked house. He finds them because they can't stay there, and they can't return. They can only keep moving ahead.

Those disciples began life as relatively powerless, probably illiterate peasants. Without any sort of personality assessment whatsoever, Jesus saw possibilities in them that they didn't see in themselves. Mary Magdalene the Insightful and Simon Peter the Visionary and Thomas Didymus the Builder were just three among them. You have to figure that Jesus also found those who would become the Administrator, the Empath, the Cheerleader, the Accountant, the Nurturer, the Artist, the Storyteller, and on and on and on. Jesus needed them not because they were the same; he needed them because they were different.

Jesus began his work by gathering the disciples around his physical body. But that would always have been limiting. His physical body couldn't be everywhere at once. His physical body couldn't express the breadth of possibility of all human bodies. Instead Christ's physical body was replaced by a spiritual body, composed at first of those early disciples. More than two thousand years later, it includes us. Today, we are members of the body of the resurrected Christ.

Let me quote the *Book of Common Prayer* on that. During our baptismal rite, just before the priest blesses the water of baptism, the priest says these words: “We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.”¹ I would add that the church has a fundamental understanding that it is by virtue of our baptism that each of us is ordained to continue God’s work of reconciliation in the world. All of that is expressed in today’s collect of the day.²

There is so much to do. Fear-filled houses were not for those first disciples, and they are not for us. The resurrected Jesus calls us forth. He sees just who we are; we can be just who we are. Thank God, we are miraculously and marvelously varied. Together, we are all that we need; together, we are all that God needs.

Notes

¹ *The 1979 Book of Common Prayer*, 306.

² The Collect for the Second Sunday of Easter, BCP, 224: “Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ’s Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith”