

April 19, 2020
The Second Sunday of Easter, Year A
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Psalm 16
Acts 2:14a,22-32
John 20:19-31

When it comes to human resources, God works with what God has. As it turns out, what God has is more than adequate. It may even be that what God has is exactly what God wants and needs. If we are inclined to doubt that, we need look no farther than today's scripture readings.

First, we catch up with Peter. The last time we saw Peter was on Good Friday, when the cock had crowed over his third denial of Jesus, and he “went out and wept bitterly.”¹ Now, it's Pentecost. The Holy Spirit has been conferred on the disciples, they've spoken in a variety of languages and as a result been accused of being “filled with new wine.” In response, Peter is preaching Jesus crucified and risen. Peter-the-Denier, a.k.a. Peter-the-Impetuous, a.k.a. Peter-the-Guy-Jesus-Needed-to-Scold—this Peter is suddenly in charge.

Next, we catch up with Thomas. Peter's transformation happens behind the scenes, but we see Thomas's in close-up. The only other time in the Gospels we heard from Thomas was when Jesus was talking about preparing the way to the father, and Thomas asked, “How can we know the way?” Thomas-the-Doubter, a.k.a. Thomas the Cautious, a.k.a. Thomas-the-One-Jesus-Needed-to-Convince—this Thomas is the first one to call Jesus not only “my Lord,” but also “my God.”

If Peter and Thomas are the exemplars, one might safely assume that Jesus was willing to recruit disciples who are less than perfect. Peter's denial and Thomas's doubt could not have been any surprise to Jesus. Jesus would have been unsurprised not because he could see the future; Jesus would have been unsurprised because Jesus knew Peter and Thomas well enough to predict how they would respond under pressure. Jesus saw *exactly* who they were. *And* Jesus knew that what is sometimes manifested as weakness can instead be manifested as strength. The strength of Peter's impetuosity is power; the strength of Thomas's caution is insight. They just needed a little help in making the shift.

One might imagine that Peter and Thomas were regular people. As such they would have been born with certain personality inclinations, the expression of which was shaped by their life experiences. Like regular people, some of those experiences must have been difficult or painful. Like regular people, some of those experiences must have left them wounded. But here, soon after the horrific events of Good Friday, Peter and Thomas have experienced redemption. Their wounds have been healed; the gift of the Holy Spirit has been transformational. They still carry scars, but Peter-now-Powerful and Thomas-now-Insightful have joined Jesus in resurrected life.

During the season of Easter, it's important to remember that resurrected life isn't just about life after death; it's also about life right now. Christ IS risen. We Episcopalians say in *The Book of Common Prayer* that "The inward and spiritual grace at Baptism is union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God's family the Church, forgiveness of sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit."² At baptism, Christians experience death and rebirth. For Christians, by the grace of God, with the gift of the Holy Spirit, *resurrected* life is *daily* life.

It's not that every day is simple or easy. Life still brings attendance at the school of hard knocks. Every human is born with certain personality inclinations, the expression of which is shaped by their life experiences. Every human being is wounded, but by the grace of God, with the gift of the Holy Spirit, those wounds are healed; the Holy Spirit is transformational. The scars are still there, but that which is sometimes manifested as weakness can instead be manifested as strength.

In our reading from Acts, Peter says, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses."³ That *us* includes US; we, too, are witnesses. We are witnesses, and we are more than witnesses; we are manifestations of the body of Christ. We are Christ's resurrected body in the world. As to the modeling of our lives, we get our primary clues from Jesus. I think this implies that we should be willing to reveal our own scars to others, and see the scars that others are showing to us. This is exactly how we demonstrate the fact of our own resurrecting transformations.

That's yet another way in which Christianity remains as counter-cultural as it ever was. It's also another example of how weakness can be transformed to strength. Acknowledging our transformation—from weakness to strength, from wounded to healed—leverages the full potential of that transformation, because it sweeps along others. Those not-so-positive aspects of Peter and Thomas could have been left out of the gospel stories, but they weren't. Their examples encourage us to take our turn showing our scars so that others might join us in resurrected life.

You've heard the old adage, "Don't just sit there—do something." This week I was thinking about its couter-adage, "Don't just do something—sit there!" We're all on the lookout for the unexpected blessings of this time of extreme isolation. One of the things I'm seeing is what I'm going to summarize as a sort of noticing that seems to be bringing a burgeoning tenderness. There seems to be a renewed appreciation of kindness and even empathy. While literal masks are going on, metaphorical ones seem to be coming off. Maybe it's because *everyone* is having a hard time; maybe it's because human goodness really does show its muscle when times get tough. I hope that the new kindness and empathy being manifested outlasts the acute phase of this crisis, because the chronic phase is going to last a long time. To put it another way, my hope is that I am, and that you are, learning things during this time about how to better manifest the body of Christ in the world.

As Jesus knew those first disciples, foibles and all, God knows us, foibles and all. Maybe Jesus chose those first disciples *in spite* of their foibles; or maybe he chose those first disciples *because* of them. We are more than adequate; we are what God wants and needs. There's no doubt about it.

Notes

¹ Matthew 26:75 NRSV.

² *The 1979 Book of Common Prayer*, 858.

³ Acts 2:32 NRSV.