

Acts of the Apostles 4:32-35

1 John 5:1-6

John 20:19-31

On Easter Sunday, new life is truly palatable. You can feel life in all the rejoicing that surrounds us, in the spirit of hope and confidence. On this eighth day of Easter things have shifted, we are a little more realistic, we have our feet on the ground. Where the first two lessons continue that surreal atmosphere of Easter Sunday, the gospel lesson today describes the disciples hiding in fear behind locked doors. Thomas is the center of attention, representing so many of us, as he struggles to believe Jesus is risen from the dead. There is much to notice and ponder in this gospel lesson: the Risen Lord with his visible wounds of crucifixion, the greeting of peace, the mission to be a forgiving presence within the world.

The disciples had every reason to hide and to lock the door. They pretty much ran off and failed to defend their Lord. They should be concerned that what happened to Jesus could very well happen to each one of them. Into this upper room enters the Risen Lord who approaches them with words of peace, not once but a number of times. "Peace be with you." Seemingly with understanding, Jesus comes to them and embraces them with mercy, love, and peace. In other words, Jesus forgives them, as he invites them to leave their failures behind and to move forward into a new venture. Their mission was to forgive sins, to set people free of all that would separate them from God and from one another. That is the ministry that Jesus gave his life for. This ministry would continue and be possible because Jesus breathed on them, thus empowering them with strength and confidence. This is the fundamental work of each one baptized into Christ Jesus. We first recognize and strive to understand and believe that we have been forgiven. If we are unable to let go of our own past, we are not going to be able to genuinely forgive others or to be instruments of peace. Having a genuine relationship with the Risen Lord, helps us let go of our past that perhaps haunts and bothers us.

This brings us to that one apostle who happened to be absent on that evening of the resurrection. We are not sure where he might have been but Thomas misses out on any personal encounter with Jesus, as well as, the gift of peace and forgiveness. Too much emphasis, I would say, has been placed on Thomas as a "doubter" which is not mentioned at all in the gospel accounts. Too little emphasis has been placed on his desire to touch the Lord, the source of life. The other disciples tried to convince Thomas, "We have seen the Lord!" But he was locked in his conviction that he must touch Jesus' wounded hands and side. One week later the wounded, risen Jesus, stands before the wounded disciple and invites him to touch his wounds. Thomas does not touch the Lord but makes a profound profession of faith, "My Lord and my God!" There are a couple of things happening here that we should notice. We are all a part of a wounded humanity and Jesus very much shares with us in that wounded humanity. He invites us to walk through our own woundedness and to truly live with him. The wounds in the Risen Lord are there to remind us that the body of Christ in this world is wounded and needs to be touched. We members of Christ, the body of Christ, are to be his merciful and healing presence for others. "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." Earlier in this same gospel account, Jesus said blessed are those willing to wash the feet of another, blessed are those willing to do these things.

We gather here each Sunday that we might reach out and touch the Lord and that our hearts might also be touched by the Lord. In order to grow spiritually and deepen that relationship we cannot avoid our failures. The secret and the grace of this Christian faith is that Jesus, the merciful Christ,

meets us in the midst of our failures. He offers us peace and sends us forth to be a peaceful presence for others.