

## **Building a New Normal - Painful Signs of Hope”**

**2 Easter B   April 11, 2021   Rev. Dr. David Gardner Tweed**

### **First Reading: Acts 4:32-35**

<sup>32</sup>Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. <sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>There was not a needy person among them, for as many owned lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold. <sup>35</sup>They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

### **Gospel: John 20:19-31**

<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Judeans, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them, and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>27</sup>Then he said 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.” <sup>28</sup>Thomas said to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing, you may have life in his name.

In John, Thomas misses the big event and wants now to be included. A week later his friends are locked down and fearful of what might come their way. The risen Christ however is not stopped by barriers but rather brings Peace/Calm/Assurance to the Disciples even in the midst of their fear. Unlike in the Synoptics (Mt, Mk, Lk), the Holy Spirit – the same Spirit that Jesus “gave up” at his death – is given personally to the disciples in a very intimate way – he directly breathes upon them. In the synoptics the Spirit is given only after Jesus has ascended. Recall the similar ‘wind’ reference found in Genesis as “God’s Spirit hovered” and the “Breathe of Life” was given to Adam. This life giving Spirit is what the Risen Christ gives.....with it comes peace, assurance, calm, belief, etc. The way in which Thomas is restored to the community is by touching the wounds. Resurrection does not diminish the signs of Christ’s suffering but rather transforms them into a bridge of connection with our wounds and suffering. Thomas touches not power but God’s sustaining love shown through vulnerability in order to believe. This is where trust, belief and openness begin – in acknowledging that God understands our burdens, pains, injuries and slights. God is also not hindered by what the world considers “locked doors or hearts” in bringing and offering what is available in God.

In Acts the community of believers has enough confidence and unity in God’s presence and promise to share what they have with one another so that anyone and everyone could be included and no one might have any need.

- I. The opposite of faith is not doubt for that is an outward looking window of the vulnerable dwelling place of faith; the opposite of faith is certainty for that is where buildings built upon sand are formed; apathy – certainty’s cousin has no care as to whether a house of faith is ever built at all – it would simply stand in the rain and either deny or not care that they are getting wet. Agree or not? Why?
- II. Christ doesn’t condemn Thomas but invites him to bring his doubts and desire for inclusion forward. In what ways does your faith carry doubt? With whom have you discussed your doubts? Have you gained any insight? If you have not asked for guidance how can you expect God to help you grow in and through the purpose of doubts? What is the purpose of doubt in faith? and how does God seem to respond to it?
- III. If we are to experience a peace which passes all understanding, a peace which Christ brings into the locked parts of our hearts then touching the vulnerable places of anxiety and fear is where to begin. Claiming it, naming it,

sharing it – these are the bridges of connection that allow Christ’s peace to enter in, just as Christ shares his Promise of victory beyond the pain. Building a New Normal has in its beginnings a recognition of the signs/marks/groans of pain’s presence and the hunger for connection to something beyond it. This is Thomas’ desire and ours as well. What injury/resentment/burden do you need or want to work through so that you can experience more of Christ’s presence and peace in your life, relationships and view of the world? Have you begun the work to receive help as is the Spirit’s desire for you to do?

In Acts the Christian community is living the vision of true community. It is not just the sharing of tangible resources but the true care/consideration for another’s perspective and needs as well as a common centering belief in Christ’s abundant presence that unites and drives them. Many sociologists believe this care for one another was a main driving force for how the early church grew so exponentially. Basic needs have not changed and societal needs have remained much the same too. Where do you see the church community living this vision and where do you see the church needing to do a better job? How ‘bout specifically at LCR? Are you helping in some way? God working through your generosity and trust that God can use your gifts well can give you confidence that lives will be changed because of your involvement or impacted without your efforts. Do you realize this as the holy work you are invited to do and partner in?