

Surprised by Peace
Second Sunday of Easter
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Text: John 20:19-31

As I walked up to the front door of my friend Becky's house all the lights were off. Hmm, I thought, Becky said we were going to meet at this time at her house. I quickly check my text messages for the conversation that we had just had. Yup, this was the time Becky was expecting me to be here. With great hesitation I rang the doorbell. It took a few more seconds than usual but Becky came to the door. As I stepped into the dark house. Becky flipped on the lights and all my favorite people appeared to me in the light! Surprise! They shouted! Happy Birthday!

They had got me. They surprised me! It was wonderful, thoughtful and well super surprising!

I know this isn't everyone but, I actually really like surprises. I mean, not like: surprise your basement is flooded, or surprise! Your car won't start, or surprise! You're sick: kind of surprises.

But I love surprises like...surprise! You found 20 dollars from last year in your spring coat, or surprise! You get a day off or surprise! Your friend Jesus, who once was dead is now alive!

I love surprises like those!

In the story we read today from the Gospel of John. We find the disciples locked away in a house. Can you imagine them? Sitting in the dark, huddled together in silent fear. Only their dark and cloudy, guilty and scared thoughts fill the room.

They will probably find us here.

Who took Jesus' body? They will think it was us.

What will happen now?

What will we do without Jesus, our teacher?

I can't believe I denied I knew him.

How will I forgive myself?

As these thoughts flood the room in almost palpable fear. Then something surprising happens.

Jesus appears to them. Death was no barrier to this guy, and some locked doors weren't going to keep him out either.

Surprise!

And at his appearance, Jesus offers something they were all longing for; he offers them peace.

Peace be with you.

It is with this greeting that the disciples that were gathered there, rejoiced. They uttered the sigh of relief, Alleluias they were holding back. And they saw they were reunited with their Messiah once again.

This peace that Jesus offers is not a put a band aid over it call it good, a kiss it and it make it better moment. this isn't just a wish or a hope from the Risen Lord. The peace that Jesus offers in this moment was a declaration of that peace that is already among them, it is among them in the person of Jesus Christ.

Moments before they were huddled together in fear of what was next, and in the next moment, the suffered, risen one appears to them and declares peace to them.

They were surprised by peace.

Jesus' declaration of peace comes with a call. It comes with a chance to live into the New Life that was offered in the one that stood before them with his scarred hands and side.

Jesus' declaration of peace comes with directions and a director. This story of surprising peace that we find on this Eastertide morning is the answer to the So what, and now what questions that Easter morning compels us to ask.

In these post resurrection moments, the disciples are given the ways to live into this peace: Jesus gives the Holy Spirit and instructs that forgiveness is an important part of this new life.

This new way, this new creation, is perfectly symbolized by the risen Jesus breathing upon his disciples with the holy breath of God's own life, that is to say, with the Holy

Spirit. We are reminded here in this moment of the creation story in Genesis chapter 2 when God breathes life into Adam in the Garden. It is God who gives life, so

On Easter Sunday evening, a rag-tag bunch of frightened disciples who deserted and denied their Lord are now made new, as Christ creates a new community, a new humanity, the Church.

By Christ death and resurrection, Christ has recreated broken humanity in his own image and likeness. And proceeds to give this new humanity the same mission that God the Father once gave him, a mission of declaring peace and forgiveness.

We, like the disciples, have a decision to make. Either the facts of this life are set—we are born, we grow up, we live our lives and then we die and there is nothing to do but grab what we can get in whatever time we have left. OR we can live like the resurrection makes a difference. We can step into the life of surprising peace that Christ brings us and step into the whole other agenda that has been set before us, one marked with forgiveness and unity, filled with light; the very heart of the resurrection message.

We are called to be little surprise parties of peace and forgiveness.

Called to believe, although we do not always see.

Called to choose light instead of darkness, to forgive each other, even when it's hard work;

Called to offer peace to everyone we meet, and to actually live that peace by offering forgiveness.

We are called to do more than just hashtag or say that Black lives matter, but to live like they do and call the systems and people around us to live in this way.

We are called to pray for those who bring fear; who use violence to communicate their ills, to pray for the prisoner and the systems they live.

These are compelling things, this new way of life, gifted to us by Christ's declaration of peace, it is New Creation breaking forth, we are closer and closer to living into the light we are promised in God's word to us.

We can step into this light. Christ offers us this light...

But let's face it, we are locked away in our dark houses that are dead bolt locked with fear and shame. We too marvel and navel gaze at our own failures, our own inadequate ways, in the ways that we have denied Jesus when push really comes to shove.

Christ offers us surprising peace, glorious light and new life of forgiveness but we do not know what do with it. For us, at some point in our lives, the joy of Easter seems to hit us right over the head and that then topples down into the giant abyss of fear, worry and doubt that we find ourselves traveling through every day.

Christ is risen and that makes a difference. But sometimes we doubt it.

That is why God gives us the good gift of Thomas in this story. Good ol' doubting Thomas. Who has gotten a nickname that doesn't really fit what's going on here. I say we re-name him, start a trend and call him honest Thomas, or, I like alteration for a good nick name; Tenacious Thomas or maybe even 'actually - fesses- up – to – the – surprising - nature- of – the – resurrection' Thomas. (The last one will probably catch on) This honesty invites us deeper into the life of peace and forgiveness that Jesus offers us. It isn't something that isolates us, or that causes God to turn God's back on us. This honest confession of disbelief is the real humanness that God is used to dealing with in humans.

This is the story of redemption, of restoration of humanity to God. Humans live in darkness, God gives light, humans are surprised by this light, Humans doubt it, God offers light... and on and on the merry go round goes.

So the way that Jesus 'handles' Thomas is consistent with the way that the Triune God always handles these types of situations, with love, mercy and re-directing.

Jesus allows 'actually - fesses- up – to – the – surprising - nature- of – the – resurrection' Thomas by allowing Thomas to experience the scarred body of Christ. Jesus allows him to touch and see and experience that it really is me, and then invites him to believe.

I wonder if Thomas' mind goes back to what happened in the upper room only 4 days before. When Jesus broke bread and said this is my body given for you. The way that Jesus offers his own body for our own disbelieving hearts is part of what happens when we gather together at the table. God gives us the good gift of experiencing the broken

bread and poured cup, as a gift of grace and love, peace and forgiveness amidst our doubting hearts After all, didn't the Psalmist say, "*O **taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.*** We are not put to shame because we cannot always believe, but are welcomed to experience this new life in real ways with all our human tendencies.

Big PAUSE

I am reminded of the countless movie scenes where a long lost thought dead love one returns. The script usually has the other character hold the once lost one's face in their hands and say something like, is it really you?

We are Thomas'. In all of our humanness, we are Thomas', surprised by the peace that Christ's resurrection offers.

Like the disciples we have had moments of loss, confusion and chaos when we have shut down and denied the possibility and probability of any return from the dark desperate void of our own broken grief. Our hearts have shut down as securely as the locked doors of that room on that first Easter evening.

I am never sure how, or why, Jesus comes to us and stand in that sequestered place of fear and forgetfulness, but he does again and again. He is miraculously there despite our barricades and hostility that often make Thomas sound tame.

Jesus is surprisingly there, and maybe all we want to do is do what the movie characters do, hold his face and sob, "*Is it really you?*"

So Perhaps we need to take another sign from Thomas and fall at the knees of Jesus' ever patient, ever returning, always reminding and always forgiving love. And say My Lord and my God!

Just as John the Gospel writer says; these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

This is the Good News of the Gospel, live in its peace.

Amen!