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St. Thomas Church
4.11.21; Easter 2B
Acts 4:32-35; 1st Jn
1:1-2:2; Jn 20:19-31

A Love That Never Dies

Can you think of things you can't see with your very own eyes, but know them to be true? Take a moment and think about this past week and see what comes to mind. For me, what comes immediately to mind is the wind. We can't actually see the wind, but we believe the wind is real, especially during a storm or when a cool breeze on a warm beach comforts us.

How about the fragrance of a flower? That, too, is not something we can see but believe it to be real. The season of Easter is all about flowers. Sometime today I invite all of you to take time to find a blossoming flower and meditate on the fragrance of God's love. Breathe in the reality of God's presence in all of creation.

And how about love? We can't actually see, measure, or weigh it objectively like gold or silver. But we know it is there as a force that spiritually animates and inspires loving, even sacrificial behaviors or actions.

I fondly remember one of my favorite psychology professors at the University of Washington. He had been a PhD student for over 10 years—unable to defend his dissertation because he was told that his subject of research was too metaphysical.

What was the subject he was he was investigating? You guessed it; it was love. I didn't have the gumption to tell him that maybe he should try switching majors and become a

(2)

philosopher, poet, or theologian instead? I am so glad he decided to hide out in the pseudo-science I so deeply love: metaphysical psychology! So glad I am not alone!

To me the core of the Easter message is that no matter what we encounter and experience in life, we come to know through the eyes of faith that love never dies. This is so profoundly proclaimed by the Apostle Paul in the 8th chapter of Romans,

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

In today’s gospel story, we literally get the sense that Jesus has been given the task of breathing into life his disciples. The disciples had had the breath knocked out of them when confronted with the likelihood that that the love they had known through Jesus might be never return. Even though we can’t see it, we know it to be true for the disciples and us. Take a moment to feel the movement—the stirring--of that new life within you—with the birth of love in all of creation.

The Spirit of God has been with us from the start. We recall the words from Genesis, *“In the beginning when God created the heavens and earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness*

(3)

covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” While we can’t see it, we know it be true—God is forever creating love and love never dies.”

I was recently reminded of that when I uncovered an old poem I wrote when I was 16 years old on the occasion of my grandmother’s death. It was tucked away in my father’s old scrapbook. It was an attempt to come to terms with the reality that my grandmother’s love might be gone forever. Wandering alone in a vast garden of roses on my grandparent’s farm, numb with grief and filled with heartache, I was overtaken by the invisible fragrance of those roses. They revealed God’s love—every bit as real as if Jesus had appeared in bodily form and held my hand.

The poem is entitled, “To Those Who Mourn.”

The memorable relationships must be parted;
Let us now bless the departed.

For those who live and remain in sorrow; May they think
about tomorrow.

To those who are forced to die; May they have what we
can’t buy.

What a small price for healed wounds; Because of Christ
there is no doom.

Our sensitive emotions have been ignited; Wonderful is the
time when we are reunited.

(4)

Today's easter story is all about discovery of a love that never dies. It is the story of how a group of grieving disciples, traumatized by the execution of their leader, are reunited with God and each other through the gift of faith and receiving the love that they can't quite see—can't quite touch, measure, or full describe—expect through the eyes of faith.

The Gospel of John reveals that there are different types of faith journeys. Jesus always meets his followers where they are and helps them to take yet another step. For the “beloved disciple” faith is restored almost immediately upon seeing the empty tomb. Mary returns to faith when the Lord calls her by name. Ten of the disciples need to actually see the risen Lord Jesus in person showing them his hands and his side and his peace before they could have their faith restored. The only thing different about Thomas' journey is that you can't take someone else's word for it—he needs to experience Jesus himself before faith could be reborn.

Thomas' faith journey is highlighted today so it is deserving of our attention. He believes he needs something more--he needs to be able to touch Jesus' wounds. And I would say, Thomas needs his own wounds to be seen and healed. Isn't it interesting that the need Thomas has—the prerequisite for faith that he is so certain about-- completely disappears once Jesus offers the opportunity for Thomas to touch his wounds? And more than that, to experience a love that, until that moment, has been hard to see.

(5)

Having God answer all of our questions and acquiring a bunch of intellectual knowledge before we enter into a relationship with him is not something God requires of us. It may even interfere with our having a relationship with God or anyone for that matter. We trust and have faith that God knows what He is doing although there is a lot we can't see through human eyes. And this insight dear friends, is why we Episcopalians try not to require folks to consent to a lot of doctrinal or moral requirements on the front end of belonging to God or our community.

We do not require that infants, seekers, doubters, and skeptics have all the right and complete answers before entering into a relationship of faith and trust with Christ. We believe the church's sacraments of baptism and eucharist are full of faith in a love that is partially hidden and even mysterious. Ultimately, just like in today's gospel story, we trust in the mystery of our faith to breathe new life into us and overtake us with love. Each Sunday we proclaim (join me if you would like) the mystery of our faith: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again and again."

It is important to take a moment to talk more deeply about faith. In today's story, Jesus is talking about the spiritual fruits of trusting in God and the consequences when we are unable to trust in God—in other words, how to be in a healthy, vibrant relationship with him. So, when you hear or read the word belief or unbelief in today's gospel story, know that the writer is

(6)

(6)

talking about what promotes faith in God and either builds or rebuilds the kind of trust that creates new life.

It is so important to recognize Jesus is not attempting to engage in an intellectual or theological debate with his followers nor is he condemning healthy questioning or doubting that is a critical part of the faith journey. Honest questioning is the way we make faith real and our own. There are so many ways faith can be defined and expressed, but I keep going back to my favorite, Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Faith inevitably means struggle. That is so clear in Thomas’ faith journey and that is why we love him because we know it is real and the love, he eventually finds with Jesus is real. Many times, in my own life I have felt that God needed to adequately answer my questions—usually about suffering—before I could fully let God in—before I could trust in Him again after experiencing yet another painful life event. And then inevitably, God reappears--God who I often can’t see with my own eyes but know is alive because of what I see in your lives.

Today, we gather in the name of the Risen One who brings faith back to life and nurtures us back to health and community, one by one, eucharist by eucharist, baptism by baptism, confirmation by confirmation, revealing his love and mercy in a new way. Just as Jesus went back for his first disciples and especially Thomas, he comes back for us with a love that never dies.
Amen.

