Second Sunday of Easter All Saints’ Church

April 3, 2016 Year C

Acts 5:27-32 Revelation to John 1:4-8

Psalm 150 John 20:19-31

On the night of the Resurrection, the disciples gather in an Upper Room, someplace hopefully safe, behind locked doors. They are terrified for their lives. I assume they have heard Mary’s testimony, “I’ve seen the Lord,” but they don’t get its significance. Either they can’t believe their ears and are at best confused or they seriously doubt her. Why should they believe her? Death is death. To see is to see. They know Jesus was nailed to a tree, slammed into a tomb, buried deep underground, guarded by soldiers, and condemned to death by the ruling powers, those kings who can do anything to anybody. Jesus is lifeless, gone forever. And now what are they going to do? Will those ruling, seek them out, and without a moment’s hesitation end their lives? Some imaginary vision of Jesus does not give solace.

So they are the huddled masses yearning to be free, with no exit, no way out, finding the little comfort to be had by hiding behind locked doors which they know deep down, is a delusionary protection. They too will be dead, soon.

And then he arrives. Jesus. “Peace be with you.”

Could it really be Jesus? And then with a little help from their friend, they see because Jesus shows them his hands and his side which have been pierced by the death blows, and like Mary in the tomb, they in their own cramped quarters, recognize….. that who they are seeing…… is Jesus.

What could this mean?

John tells his gospel in a way that makes the night of the Resurrection- Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost all wrapped up in one.

This is the pinnacle point of the disciples’ lives, just waiting for direction. And what does Jesus do? He breathes on them.

The verb “to breathe” in only used twice in their own scriptures. In the Genesis story, God formed adam, the earth creature, out of the earth of the ground, adamah, and breathes into his nostrils the breath of life and adam, the earth creature, becomes a living being.

The next time the verb, “to breathe” is used is in the Book of Ezekiel. In the midst of the valley full of bones, the Spirit of the Lord sets Ezekiel down, and in this place of death, he tells him to prophesy by the very breath the Lord puts within him. And so Ezekiel does, and “there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And as I looked, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them” and yet there was no breath. Then the Lord God comes from the four winds, “to breathe upon the slain, that they may live.”

To breathe into…. The breath of the Living God…. The Holy Spirit. Jesus is breathing new life into the disciples. This is not some new phenomenon. The Holy Spirit has been with them all along. From their very creation through all their valleys of death to this very day. They just don’t recognize it, just as they didn’t recognize Jesus.

Just as clear as Jesus and the Holy Spirit are in front of the disciples, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are in front of us. Do we see it? Do we recognize it?

It’s not easy. To be fair, all that the disciples have understood to be faith is being reshaped. Patterns that gave them order, direction, guidance, sensibility, sustainability, and assurance have disappeared. Things like rituals, sacrifices, prayers, dutiful actions, service, authority, beliefs are being seen in new ways, through a new lens.

What is this lens?

This past week, in Peterborough, we lost electricity for about 45 minutes. I was in the rectory, and as I went to get some food out of the fridge, I noticed my fridge light was out. “Darn, just one more reason to go to the grocery store.” But then I noticed the clock on the microwave was blinking. I switched on the kitchen light. No light. No electricity.

I got on my coat to go over to check the Parish Hall. No electricity. I went over to Reynolds Hall and met Ivy and Anthony preparing for the Community Supper. No electricity. We talked about the gas stoves and the late evening light and that the supper could still be held, electricity or not. “Ok, that’s good.” I walked outside and met our neighbors on the street. Yep, no electricity. Roy’s doesn’t have it, neither does the Toadstool.

“Ok.” Yet, I can still do some of the chores I had set out to do. And so I went back to the rectory and got busy, and as I was taking my recyclables downstairs, I turned on the basement light. Such a natural reaction. No electricity. Pitch dark. Of course! What was I thinking? I have only been talking about no electricity for the past ½ hour. I hope many of you can relate! When the ice storm of 2008 hit, I was at Exeter and we had 1,000 students to feed and keep warm. All day we worked with the Red Cross and emergency teams as we moved students from little houses into larger dorms, found ways to feed them and keep them warm. I worked all day on making arrangements. I turned down emergency housing for myself because I wanted to build a fire in my little house, pile the blankets near the fire, and hunker down. And have some quiet. It had been a long day. And as I was preparing the fire, I thought how great it would be to have music as well. Just as everything was set, candles lit, I turned on the stereo. Oh my….right no electricity. Duh!! What was I thinking!

Patterns of living. Hard to break. This week, I laughed outloud when after going downstairs to the basement, and had no light, I went upstairs to find a tax form in my closet and again flipped the switch to my closet light. No electricity. Of course. Such a habitual action. So hard to let it sink in. Hard to break my natural reliance on electricity without a thought, without any intentional effort on my part.

What else is like that?

This night that the gospel writer John is revealing to us… this night of Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost all wrapped up in One is a New Day. We are in transition. We are moving from old patterns of not seeing the Holy Spirit to new patterns of grace, where the Holy Spirit is everywhere. Will we step away from old patterns of being? Old habits?

This is why I love Thomas. He is us. He is a twin, and we are his “other half.” Everyone else got the proof from Jesus. It’s not that he is doubting; Thomas, our twin, has just been left out of the secret and wants to see as the others have had the luxury of seeing. And so Jesus gives him the goods. “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.”

What’s beautiful is that we don’t hear whether or not Thomas actually reaches out and touches Jesus. He just makes one of the most incredible declarations of faith we have yet to hear in scripture:

“My Lord and my God.” The other disciples haven’t declared that kind of faith. They know that the “lights are out” in their world, but like me, they keep flipping the switch to the old way of living their faith. They are still in their old ways, old habits, of seeing.”

It’s Doubting Thomas who forges the new way. He sees the new Pattern of Grace. Jesus is New Life. His breath is the breath of the Living God. It’s been right in front of us the whole time.

I think one of the great secrets of this gospel passage, is that we are not only Thomas’ twin, but we are also Jesus’ twin.

We are connected to Jesus by his birth, by his life, by his death, by his prayers, by his hope, by his DNA. Jesus’ story, Jesus’ unfolding ministry, shows us how he too is moving from a pattern of faith, habituated by rituals, beliefs, structures, sacrifices, and duties to a new way of seeing the living presence of the Living Lord. Just as it dawns on Jesus, it is dawning on us.

Inside the great mystery of Life and Love and new patterns of Grace, Jesus is the Light of the World. This is the New Lens. The new Light Switch.

Just as Jesus is the Light of the World, we are the light of the world. God breathes into us, all the time, the breath of the Living Lord.

We are the new lights. Easter invites us to switch them on.