Second Sunday of Easter April 23, 2017

All Saints’ Year A

Acts of the Apostles 2:1-4a, 22-32 I Peter 1:3-9

Psalm 16 John 20:19-31

We thank you dear Lord for all the ways you easter within us. AMEN.

Notice in our gospel story this morning that Jesus is recognized by his wounds. “See here, touch my side, put your finger into my nailed hand.” And the disciples rejoice to see Jesus again. They know him by his wounds.

I think it’s kind of strange that Jesus is not transformed into a perfect body…. The same Jesus, just missing all that bloody stuff. But no, he’s still wounded. I didn’t realize it before, but I think, subconsciously, I imagine our bodies in the afterlife (if there are bodies) as more perfect than the ones we have now… you know, minus the arthritis, the aching knees, the extra pounds, the inevitable wrinkles…. Yes, renewed, restored, rebooted…. somehow more perfect than who we are now, that’s for sure.

My youngest daughter told me a few weeks ago that she wished people would stop telling her that she is the prime of her life. “Why,” I asked her (by the way you are).

“Really, you’re asking? This can’t be it. Being in your 20’s is not all what it’s cracked up to be. I’m missing some wisdom. Let’s do some trading. A little of my youth for your knowledge of life. Deal?” We laughed. And of course she’s right; and without knowing it, she helped me to see some of the categories my mind sets up- health good, sickness bad, youth good, aging bad, beauty good, ugliness bad, faith good, faithlessness bad … the list goes on

Jesus is breaking down categories as well, breaking down barriers. The disciples see him and are so relieved of so many things- their fear, their confusion, and most certainly of their guilt.

Oh yes, guilt!

Mary sees the empty tomb and does not believe until Jesus calls her by name.

The disciples hear Mary’s testimony about her encounter with Jesus, but they do not believe her and lock themselves up in a room because of their fear.

Thomas hears the witness of the disciples but says, “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.”

All of the disciples abandoned Jesus, running for their lives, doubting and literally scared to death. And dear doubting Thomas- he’s just a bridge for all us future believers. We are his twin. We would not have acted differently.

And all of this failure doesn’t matter to Jesus. He comes and stands in their midst and says Shalom. Jesus is the Peace that surpasses all understanding. There is no judgement, and forgiveness is freely given. And then Jesus breathes into them the same breath of life that created the world, that animated dry bones, and that unshackled him from the tomb, with the raised kiss of the Spirit on the body.

“Love God with your whole heart, mind and soul. Love one another as I have loved you. Love your neighbor as yourself. And your neighbor is everyone, even your enemy. And serve each other with humility, patience and trust.” This is Jesus’ shalom.

By loving as Jesus loves, doesn’t mean that we are somehow to be arbiters of right and wrong, but rather we are called to bear the unceasing witness of God’s love in the world, even through our wounds, maybe because of them.

Jesus appears in the middle of this closed off room, just as he enters into our own rooms that are closed off. We’re shut up within an interiority that keeps Jesus’ kiss of love and life at bay. The disciples were not hunting down “proof” of the resurrection- they weren’t looking for evidence.

No, their hearts were searching for assurance. How are they going to continue to live? Who are they? How will they trust again? What is faith? Jesus comes, wounds and all, to free us from the closed off upper room of our own wounds and fears and anxiety, assuring us always. By his wounds, he has healed us. By our own wounds, we heal others. Jesus is about transforming the way we see.

When I was in my early 30’s, I was a chaplain at the Lenox Hill Nursing Home in Manhattan. It was not an easy position. Most days I wasn’t very good at being present- indeed I was not a natural, as my youth, my vitality, my eagerness to fix things often got in the way of my ministry. Without admitting it, I was afraid, stuck in my own upper room, sealed off from my own inevitability of aging.

But Jesus entered. Barriers fell. I was touched by Jesus’ spirit. Breathed upon by his kiss of love and life.

There was a woman who was suffering from tardive dyskinesia, which is an involuntary movement of the tongue as a side effect of certain medications she had taken. She was completely ostracized by the other residents. They didn’t want her to eat in the shared dining room. They couldn’t stomach eating with her because she always ate with her mouth open, and food fell out everywhere, making a mess. There was nothing she could do about it. To be blunt it was gross. Tired of being ridiculed, even though it was often subtle, she resigned herself to eat in her room. But she was so sad.

I decided that I needed to eat with her. And I have to admit, it was difficult at first. And yet, I knew that this “side effect” could have happened to anyone. As I got to know her, soon, none of it mattered. It just became a part of our dining together. And I got to know her. She was smart and funny and kind.

And then I said, “we’re going to the dining room and we are going to dine together and we’re going to have fun, and laugh, and make everyone jealous of us.” And we did just that. It wasn’t that the other residents were cruel; they were just afraid and anxious about their own vulnerabilities, their own shame and the way their own bodies were betraying them. Just as we all are. They were rejecting their neighbor because she represented to them their own fears. We just need a little push to recognize that who we are as “good and healthy and wise” really doesn’t matter. It’s all about how we are seeing, in love, through love, by love.

I’m not sure what happened as I was transferred from Lenox Hill to the Hospital for Special Surgery soon after, but I do know this, especially as I look back at that experience- that the Kingdom of God, which is very present right now, is not concerned with perfection. Rather it’s about longing to see how God sees….. we are perfect just as we are, wounds and all, and that are faith, fear and forgiveness are our teachers. There is not the good and the bad, and judgements about who is better. We are united by Christ, in Christ, next to Christ, beyond Christ as we rejoice in the gift of leaving our sealed off rooms to be breathed into by the kiss of Jesus’ love and life. AMEN