

April 19, 2020

Second Sunday of Easter

Rev. Annie Pierpoint Mertz, Preacher

Sermon Preached via Facebook Live

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Benicia

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Psalm 16

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Someone I know once admitted to me that he had completely lost his faith. He grew up in a religious household, and as a young adult took on deep study and theological reflection, often getting into intense debates with his pastor. He even got a tattoo that reflected this struggle. He was like Jacob, wrestling with angels. And then, gradually, his life just fell apart -- divorce, custody battles, a lost job. It was then that he told me, "I'm done searching for God. If God wants to find me, he knows where I am."

I wondered then -- and still wonder now -- if he will ever return to faith.

Stories of coming to belief - last Sunday, and this:

- Beloved Disciple (perhaps John, writer of Gospel) -- Saw evidence and believed
- Mary -- Grief, confusion, needed Jesus to call her name
- Disciples -- "rejoiced when they saw the Lord"
- Thomas -- doubt to belief

In all of these, Jesus is the one doing the work -- creating evidence, calling out to us, appearing, and coming back even when we miss him the first time.

I was miffed last week at Jesus for telling Mary to not hold on -- remember, he had just risen from the dead, and instead of allowing Mary a moment of celebration and joy, he reminded her that he was on his way out.

But the truth is, Jesus has a point. In my experience, faith is fluid -- it comes and goes. It lives and breathes in us. Faith rushes in when we learn that we've beaten cancer. It flows out when we hear it's come back. It fills our lungs with praise when we get the best parking spot. It rushes out when we find a ticket on our windshield. For me, gripping onto my faith and demanding that it stay put doesn't work.

I have nothing but joy for those who, like the beloved disciple, see a scrap of evidence and believe, and it sticks. My Grandmommy was like that -- her faith was tested by more fire than most, but she held onto it, knowing it was more precious than gold. She saw both her parents die before she was 26. She saw her son die when he was 40. She had not seen Jesus yet loved him. She believed in him and rejoiced with an indescribable and glorious joy. Every day she believed she was receiving the outcome of her faith, the salvation of her soul.

That was her path. Mine looks a little more like Thomas'. Perhaps yours looks like Mary's, or the disciples. But in each story, it's Jesus who's doing the work. If we don't have faith when the resurrection is standing right in front of us, Jesus will call our name. If we were too busy or distracted to believe when the Lord came the first time, Jesus will come back. If we can't leave the house to go find the Lord, Jesus will come to us there and we will rejoice. Jesus will do incredible things and leave behind evidence just in case we happen to stumble upon it.

When this principle is the heartbeat of our faith, we can trust that when it flows out it will flow back in. Christ is the one doing the work, and our job is to let him. When we have faith, we can rejoice and enjoy the sunlight of the spirit. And we can try our best to remember that if it goes, Jesus will find a way back.

So in a way, I hear a profound statement of faith in what my friend said: "'I'm done searching for God. If God wants to find me, he knows where I am.'" Maybe he will unearth some new evidence. Maybe Jesus will call his name or come in

through closed doors when he doesn't expect it. Who knows? But I think that the Lord does want to find him, and even now is searching.

May he, and all of us, be found. Amen.