

Holy Week was unsettling for me this year. It wasn't just my first time jitters celebrating the Great Vigil as a priest, but the whirlwind of the suddenness of the change in worship from Maundy Thursday with the removal of the sacrament from the sanctuary, the stripping of the linens from the altar, the opened ombre door signaling Jesus was not here; mourning Jesus' death on Good Friday; celebrating the reconciliation of heaven and earth with his resurrection in the Vigil, and its celebration on Easter on Sunday. I understood and sided with the disciples for the first time, understanding better the turbulence they experienced with the loss of their teacher and rabbi Jesus as I sat vigil outside the sanctuary with the body and blood of Christ. Although I know that Christ is risen, I found myself still reeling from his body and blood having been taken away from us for those two days. But, here in the 5th week of Easter, I am beginning to understand.

Jesus says in today's Gospel 'when you see me you see God'. This is great news because when Jesus was gone from the sanctuary, we were not alone! God was here! God never left. Therefore, when Jesus says to the disciples sitting at their last supper with him, 'do not be afraid', the fear of the days they will experience without Jesus should lose the sting of trauma, because they will sit with him again in the exaltation of resurrection. Thus, the tension of Holy Week is not an either/or, it is a both/and: that is, we are lost and we are traumatized because we lost Jesus; but, in Jesus' bodily death, we still have a living God. This is what the Psalmist expresses so well in our Psalm this morning. The juxtaposition of crying out to God for help, and at the same time, acknowledging that God is with us. This is the understanding that Thomas and Philip don't have: that we need have no fear, because God never left the house. God was always here even in the dead body of the Son. And, the Son tells us that he, and God in him, will be with us into eternity.

Reconciling the tension between our fear that God isn't always with us, and having faith in God is hard work, as Mother Barbara often says. When we think that life has gone all wrong, do we apply our faith in God, or do we fret as if God was not there to help us through our troubled time? This is the crisis of faith Thomas expresses to Jesus with his question: 'how do we know the way to where you are going?' Jesus reminds Thomas of what he already knows with his reply: 'I am the Way, the truth and the life'.

Jesus reminds us that he and God are symptico, they are one. You may recognize the "I am" theme in his naming of himself as the 'way, the truth and the life'. If you believe in God, you can believe in me, too, he is saying. The strength of our belief can be found in receiving the body and blood of Jesus. This point of human meeting divine is reconciling of the tension between lacking faith and being aware of the presence of Christ in our lives, not just at the reception of his body and blood, but especially as we encounter trials and tribulations in our daily lives in which we remember Emmanuel. 'God is with us'.

In the world we live in, Jesus reminds us of the truth of God's presence in our lives that is revealed through our belief. What signs and wonders can you point to in this past week that reveal the presence of God in your life? Think about this for a moment. (pause) These small miracles are not only reminders of God's presence, but of your belief in it through Jesus' revelation of God by how Jesus lived his life on earth. I urge you to allow your small miracles to reconcile themselves with your doubts to allow the truth of God's presence in your life take precedence. And, I think most importantly, Jesus reminds us that he lived on earth to bring us life, as opposed to death. Instead of thinking about how we go about life based on the fact that we are going to die, what if we took that for granted, and lived as if we were never going to die? What if no one could cause you fear with the threat of death because death was no longer an issue? Jesus died a horrific death to show us that a life based on death was not the way God wanted us to live. It's as if he were saying 'Stop living your lives so that this can happen to you. Let death die with me. Live into the goodness that God is showing you through me.' And, he gave us so many examples of how to live in peace and love which are eternal qualities of life. I urge you to pick just one, and incorporate it into your Rule of Life. In this way you will be reconciling the fears of death that this world throws at you with God's desire for us to have life through Christ, and have it more abundantly.

Finally, the great reconciler of dips in faith, and knowing that God is ever with us, is prayer. God is only ever a prayer away. Use this gift that Jesus so freely used and taught us how to use. Have you ever noticed that whenever Jesus did something big, he either prayed before or prayed afterwards? And, he says at the end of this Gospel lesson that 'whatever we ask for in his name he will give us'. How cool is that?

5th Sunday of Easter_2014
Mother Betsy

So let us reconcile our lives with Jesus' life. When we go outside to finish the 10 o'clock service/our service in the beautiful Memorial Garden, we will/let us look upon its beauty as a reconciliation of God's creation with our creativity; and, be reminded of the eternity of our lives for which Jesus has made a way for us to follow him. Amen.