

## A Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter April 12, 2015

### The Church of the Epiphany, Richmond Virginia

*by David H. Knight, Interim Rector*

*We walk by faith, and not by sight;  
No gracious words we hear  
From him who spoke as none e'er spoke;  
But we believe him near.*

*We may not touch his hands and side,  
nor follow where he trod;  
but in his promise we rejoice;  
and cry, "My Lord and God!"*

*Hymn 209, stanzas 1-2*

On this Second Sunday of Easter, the gospel reading takes us back to that room on Sunday night where we find the disciples locked behind closed doors huddled in fear of those who had power over them. Even though Mary had told the disciples that very morning that she had seen the risen Lord, the disciples are still huddled in fear. The fact that Jesus was alive was still beyond their comprehension. They still were living in the horror that of enemies had killed Jesus. They must have wondered who among them would be next. And then their fear was increased by the fact that, even before Jesus died, Judas had betrayed him. Peter was so terrified for his own safety that he denied three times even knowing Jesus. Fear permeated that room that night. Into the midst of this cowering group of men Jesus comes and reveals himself to them. He gives them the greeting he had always given them, "Peace be with you." After greeting them, he showed them his hands and his side. When they saw who he was they rejoiced.

One of the lessons we learn from this passage from John's Gospel is that it is not easy, beginning with the disciples and continuing with us, to live into the reality of Easter. A week later, yet again we find the disciples in that same room. Once again in fear they have locked themselves behind closed doors. They are still unable to live as Easter people. This time Thomas was with them. He had not been with them the previous week. Once again, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then, recognizing that Thomas wasn't at all sure who he was, Jesus said, "Thomas, Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." I have always loved that moment of interchange between Jesus and Thomas. It shows Jesus' incredible compassion as he met Thomas in his doubt. He met Thomas right where he was in his moment of uncertainty and apprehension. It's the same way Jesus meets us in our doubts and uncertainties. We can just imagine that moment when Thomas suddenly felt the presence of Jesus once again. He looked at Jesus and blurted out, "My Lord and my God! It's you!"

The Easter miracle and the heart of this lesson is that Jesus comes again and again to these scared and confused disciples. The miracle at that first Easter and throughout the ages to follow was and continues to be that Jesus offered and continues to offer himself over and over again to people who long to see him. The Easter miracle is that you and I have reason have hope in the midst of our worries, our concerns, our fears, even when there is the temptation to let despair creep back in and push Easter out.

There is much that is happening around us tempts us to live in fear. There are those times when you and I want to take refuge behind locked doors in what might seem to be a safe place. Life itself can cause us to have fear and doubt. The event of 9/11 makes us fearful on another terrorist attack. We fear ISIS. Along with these fears that pervade our culture are the many radio and television political talk shows that are based on fear and that promote fear demonizing one side or the other and stirring up fear in the hearts of listeners and viewers who hang on every word. These purveyors of fear offer no solutions, they offer no hope. They are

simply voices that whip up fear and disillusionment. Are these the voices to which we want to listen? Are these voices from the talk shows helpful?

What are some of those locked doors for you and me behind which we find ourselves seeking refuge? Perhaps it is that nebulous fear of the unknown. Perhaps it is our resistance to change. Perhaps it is the fear of letting go of a cherished resentment that is holding us behind closed doors.

Whose are the voices that command our attention? Are they the negative voices of fear and despair that offer no hope, or are they the voices of hope, voices that empower us to see the possibilities that lie before us for good, possibilities for the restoration of peace and justice in our time?

As Jesus said to the disciples when he appeared to them behind those locked doors, he says to the church and to us in our own day, "Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, so I send you." It is an easy thing for us at times to remain behind closed doors yet today's Gospel is a proclamation of the good news of Easter. It is good news of hope for you and me as individuals on our personal journeys. It is good news of hope for the church. Jesus comes to us as he came to Thomas. He comes to us even before we stop doubting, even before we overcome our fear, even before we know we can unlock the doors of our false security. God brings the Easter miracle to you and to me in whatever we may be doing, but especially when you and I are afraid and when we are doubtful. As Jesus helped the disciples in their unbelief he helps us in ours as well. The Easter miracle assures us that even when we are not completely free from doubt we can have faith to step beyond the locked doors of fear. It is the Easter miracle that empowers the church to overcome its fear so that it can fulfill its mission to strive for justice even as it faces those voices that are still living on the other side of Easter, those voices that want to stay safely behind closed doors in fear of challenging the powers that diminish God's creation and human life. If the church chooses to remain on the other side of Easter, it will have no message and if it has no message it will have no power.

In response to the miracle of Easter, may you and I have the grace and the faith to believe, and may we be vessels in whatever way we can be through which the power of the risen Lord may reach others who long for peace, for justice, and most of all hope.

Jesus says to us what he said to the disciples, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

*Help then, O Lord our unbelief;  
and may our faith abound,  
to call on you when you are near,  
and seek where you are found.*

*that when our life of faith is done,  
in realms of clearer light  
we may behold you as you are,  
with full and end endless sight.*

*Hymn 209 stanzas 3-4*