

“It Was Supposed to Be...”

2nd Sunday of Eastertide
John 20: 19-31

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From the Pulpit

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“It Was Supposed to Be...”

John 20: 19-31

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*Prayer for Invocation: Holy God, open our hearts and minds
by the power of your Holy Spirit to receive what you have for us
this day. Silence in us any voice but your own. Amen.*
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How long has it been since Easter? Easter feels so long ago. I guess I should clarify. If you count the days, hours, minutes, seconds; it's as far away as it is every other week of the year - 7 days, 168 hours, 10,080 minutes, you get the idea. But if you ask me, how long it's been since Easter---I'd tell you it feels like an eon ago. That's a pretty long time. By definition, an eon is an indefinitely long period of time. So long, in fact, that geologists divide eons by the billions of years.

Easter feels so long ago. Ask a friend when the last time was he looked at a calendar, and he may lament that he didn't need a 2020 calendar at all.

We revel in the joy of Easter, usually. Believe me, last Sunday we did. The flowers helped brighten the day. The Toccata by Widor for the postlude. The smells of new life. Singing as many Alleluias as we possibly could! Butterflies released into the world. It was different for sure. And Christ is Risen! Christ is risen indeed!

But, a week later, gone are the tulips and daffodils and lilies that filled the front of the sanctuary. Gone are the butterflies. We return to livestream worship after a week at home. You are still tuning in to this community of faith from your homes. Easter feels so long ago.

As I reflect on Easter this week, what was front in center for me is that balance between joy and fear. Usually we skip too quickly to Easter Joy. We bypass the difficult parts of arrest, betrayal, trial, and crucifixion and just awake in Easter Joy.

But what many of us carry right now is fear. How will I pay my bills? When will that stimulus check arrive? Will I have to furlough our employees? Am I a carrier of Covid-19? There is a lot of fear.

We cannot forget that the days before and after that first Easter morning were full of fear. Not much joy at all.

Early in our Gospel text this morning, we encounter the disciples under their self-imposed “stay-at home order” out of fear for the authorities. The Disciples spent the first Easter evening---locked in a room. They had good reason to stay inside. They were known compatriots; associates of Jesus who had followed him all over the region. They were with him in the garden. They witnessed his arrest, trial, sentence, and the crucifixion. Wondering if they would they be next, was reason to be fearful. They knew all about crosses and consequences...so, understandably, they locked the doors.

When we feel threatened and on guard the natural thing to do is to hunker down and lock the doors, to become focused on our own security rather than the risky mission to which we are called. Jesus had given instructions to his friends. Now that he was not with them, they were afraid.

In the year 2020, we know more about being “locked in” than we ever imagined. We are more in touch with what threatens us. We know more of our own fear and its related emotions---anxiety, doubt. We are living in times that feel uncertain, and we long for what we once knew as normal. And we are grieving the loss of much of what we anticipated life would hold.

It was supposed to be...the spring season of his senior year.
It was supposed to be...the last semester before she launched into the world.

It was supposed to be...the trip of a lifetime.
It was supposed to be...her last appearance in the Olympic games in Tokyo.

Maybe you were to be the support person for your daughter when she gave birth to your first grandchild but the hospital decreased the number of visitors.

Life was all supposed to be...different. Not like this.

I wonder if the disciples thought it was supposed to be different, too.

They certainly knew the risks, but they followed Jesus anyway. Their lives together were about hearing stories and learning the

teachings of Jesus. It would take a certain togetherness for them to make it through the trying times after Jesus death. How would they carry his message forward? Together in community, the disciples learned to pray, learned to be in mission in the world, learned to stay together, even when Jesus said, “he was going on before them.”

That first Easter they were grieving their friend and at the same time holding on to their relationships. That is what the First Easter evening was about---relationships.

What we know about Jesus from this story is that, the risen Christ cannot be locked out of the room. He returns to offer them peace and sends them out with the power of the Holy Spirit. Their belief grew out of relationship.

One of the disciples was not there when Jesus came to visit the first time. It was Thomas. He was probably getting groceries or a prescription for Peter. When he returned from wherever he was, Thomas had to hear about Jesus appearance second hand. He did not believe what his friends told him until he saw proof for himself.

So, what’s amazing is that now a week later---Jesus comes back for Thomas. Jesus shows up again. Again, the doors are shut. Again, Jesus comes and stands among them, offering peace, offering the images of his hands and sides, offering himself.

Thomas believes and acknowledges Jesus, “My Lord and My God.”

To me it is puzzling that Jesus shows up not once but twice in a locked room. These appearances are remarkable. In all of the appearances stories that we have in the four gospels, the risen One appears in the most ordinary places---on the road, at the sea, on the mountaintop, in a locked room. In them we see just how far Jesus is willing to go to be in relationship with his disciples and just how far he's willing to go to be with us.

The promise of this text this 2nd Sunday of Eastertide is that Jesus cannot be stopped by any locked doors on our homes or in our hearts. Jesus comes to us as he came to the first disciples, right in the midst of our fear, pain, doubt, and confusion. He comes speaking peace, breathing into our anxious lives the breath of the Holy Spirit. That means there is no place, no room in our houses right now where we can go where Jesus cannot find us. That is meaningful and that is comforting.

What is important is that Jesus keeps showing up in the lives of his friends. In the word, in the waters of baptism, in the bread and wine, Jesus shows up. Jesus came to the disciples when their guard was down. No knock, no doorbell, he just shows up.

He, too, shows up in our lives when we least expect him. When our guard is down. When we desperately need to be broken into...there Jesus is. When he knows we will resist, he'll show up. When our fears get the best of us, when we reach for something to hold onto through difficult times, Jesus shows up. We need Jesus to keep showing up.

The other part of the same Easter message is that Jesus sends the disciples out of the locked room and into the world. If we are all staying at home too, then we need to hear what Jesus is saying. We can't stay in this locked building of the church; we can't stay in the locked places of our lives---the message of the risen Christ has to be let loose in the world. Thank goodness the disciples finally left the locked room. They went out of the doors and into the world to proclaim the Good News of their friend, the risen One.

The disciples must learn a new way of being. They must learn to rely on each other, strengthened by their relationships for the ongoing work to which Jesus calls them. They adapt and adjust. They collaborate and create new ways of engaging those who need to hear Jesus' message of love and justice. It cannot be the same as it was before, it will never be the same as it was. But it will have meaning. And it will have relevance.

So, too, for us, Jesus keeps sending us out of our safe, locked rooms, into a world that so desperately needs his gifts of life and peace. The One who wants to know us, the One who sends us out to be his hands and his feet on earth, he will keep showing up. We as a community of faith, while distant from one another for now, are called "to be" in a new way.

In this unprecedented time, we will learn to rely on each other in a new way, strengthened by the ongoing love and support of Jesus Christ. We will adapt and adjust. We will collaborate and create new ways to engage those who need to hear the message of love and justice. That can be right where we are, here and

now. With us finding ways to share the Easter message with the ones we love and by connecting with those friends and neighbors near and far. This Easter message is strengthened through our relationships.

Even if we thought our lives were supposed to be a certain way, the reality now looks vastly different. As people of faith we rely on the promises of God to sustain us in times of great uncertainty and change. These are the promises of God: Jesus will always be with us. Jesus will never let us go. God will love us unconditionally to the very end of time. In this, we can trust. In this we will not fear but in this we will rejoice.

Amen.