

S E R M O N A P R I L 1 5 2 0 1 2

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

The Rt.
Rev.
Greg
Rickel

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Sermon, Second Sunday after Easter
The Rt. Rev. Gregory H. Rickel
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
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This is the Sunday many a preacher will reflect on Thomas, doubting Thomas. And I do like Thomas a great deal. I like preaching on him because he really, sums up the way a lot of us feel about resurrection, and this whole thing we call Christianity. We don't quite know how to take it, we want prove, or we appear fools to believe it. Such is the case with an "enlightened" generation that has the arrogance to believe we know more than all those who have gone before us. We know some things, but not more, and I am always reminded there is a difference in wisdom and knowledge.

Actually, I did preach on Thomas today at about 5 this morning, at least sort of, as TV Eucharist was taped about a month ago, and I preached for this very Sunday. So, I could have even used that sermon. It would have been easy to do, understandable since I have been out of town for a few days, and probably Ok because I bet most of you were not up at 5 am watching TV Eucharist, anybody?? That is what I thought. So I could have done this, but I am not going to. Instead I want to look at Acts today, the Acts of the Apostles.

Called Acts for the very reason it would seem, it is a story of great people who do great things. There were many such books passed around in Christianity, the Acts of Thomas being one, and others, and in other religions and the world. It is about what they did, and in some respects then, what Jesus continued to do after the resurrection through them, the apostles. See, this is the Second Sunday OF Easter, not the Second Sunday after Easter, it is still Easter, it always will be, that is the ultimate message. Our passage begins thusly today,

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. (Acts 4:32 KJV)

It goes on to describe a Christian community that has long since gone by the wayside, or at least it seems so. We don't see much of what is described here in those. We are called to acts though, us, all of us even today. IN essence something could be written of us some day, The Acts of those at St. Stephen's, Seattle, or the in the Diocese of Olympia. What would they write about?

For quite a while now I have asked those being confirmed, received, reaffirmed, to send me letters beforehand because I often don't get to spend much time with them really. I want to hear their stories, when they are willing to share them, how they got to this day, what they think about it. In short, I want to read the Acts of Madeline, or Lou, before I come. Sometimes, without knowing it, they write the sermon for me. Such as it is today. Maybe most of you know this, but if not, you will after today. Louise writes of her spiritual dabbling, but then finds in the Eucharist, a stability, something she has to participate in, the mysterious within the liturgical tradition. And Madeline share her journey, and I read from her letter.

Read Madeline's letter

You can't get much better than that. I am one of those that on most days truly believes there is no such thing as coincidence. Here are two people who really do get this walk. Now, we have a lot of work to do, all of us, and I will talk more about that, and I hope we will in our forum afterward, but I think Madeline can teach us something and has. St. Susanna was a remarkable person, who reportedly died for her faith, a martyr back when being a Christian could be deadly, and was. That was her act, it needed to be then, to be a witness to God and for God as she knew God.

The people out in the world want to see that in us again. They are not going to be attracted to a church that is angry and divided, and a church that is consumed with survival instead of mission. Not having how we can make it be the most important thing, but instead what we might give to the world be the most important thing. That is a witness that is more and more missing but more and more desired by those who are the true doubters because they watch us act out of doubt and out of complacency, instead of urgency and belief.

Madeline, Lou, and all of those reaffirming. Don't do this today if you plan to hold it all for yourselves, if you plan to sit with this in great comfort, and know that well, even if the world is going to hell in a handbasket, you have got your life in order, and that is good enough. Don't do it then. We have enough of that.

That idea and way of being will prove to be the end of this church, and I am convinced some expression of a faith more based in the Kingdom Jesus envisioned and dreamed and spoke of will arise. I hope we are part of it.

Jesus did not return to that room that day with a perfect body, we often miss this. He came back with wounds, wounds that Thomas was able to put his hand to, and know by those wounds this was indeed the Jesus he had mourned for. That is a great witness to us too.

Thomas, doubted the reality of the risen Jesus. The world doubts us, and our ability to live it out, because they watch our Acts. God will not save you because of them, but there is everything to suggest God expects it of us. That is the kind of faith we are called to, to be examples of the life Jesus lived, the kingdom he envisioned, the legacy he left us. Our words, lives, acts should reflect just that.

So let this day not be an end, but instead a forward movement of momentum, a push, to decide how you will share this great gift you have been given, by taking your wounds, and sharing them, and being Christ to a broken and thirsting world.

The Rt. Rev. Greg Rickel
Bishop of the Diocese of Olympia
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Seattle

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