

Second Sunday of Easter

March 30, 2008

Lessons: Psalm 16; Acts 2:14a, 22-32; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Before we look at this week's lessons, I want to touch on a couple of things that we have covered before, but that I believe are important for us all to keep in mind.

As I think each of you would agree, we come here on Sunday mornings to Worship God. We come to reflect on and say "thank you" for the blessings that we have received, to say that we are sorry for ways that we may have run amuck during the last week or so, and to pray for our needs and the needs of others. On those Sunday's where the Eucharist is available we also come to be empowered to go out to love and serve others.

We also come here on Sundays to experience the Fellowship of other Christians. Most of us have heard over the years that the Christian life is not just a solitary existence. We learn and grow together. We comfort and are comforted as we meet together. Together we enhance our time of Worship, and when we cannot be together we are missed. Our time together is important.

And we also come together on Sundays so that we can hear or experience something that will make us more like Christ when we leave church and go back out into the world and our individual lives. As we have often discussed, it does not seem to be of great value if what we hear and experience and feel here at church does not have some type of impact on our everyday lives. What we experience Sunday morning needs to move from our ears to our hearts and then down into our hands and our feet. It needs to become part of us and it needs to impact how we live our day to day lives.

Each one of us is an individual. We are each different from the rest of us who are sitting here this morning. We are each at a different stage of our life's journey and we are all at somewhat different spots on our Spiritual Journeys. But regardless of our differences, we should each seek to hear something in the lessons, the sermon or some part of the service, that we can take with us as we leave the church, something that can make our lives better. Something that can help us to become "Instruments of Peace."

I share all of that, because if these short homilies or sermons do not offer something to use or to think about, you need to speak up. You need to feel very comfortable saying so and asking questions. That is how we will all grow.

A few weeks ago we heard lessons that were about Baptism. We heard about the impact of baptism on Jesus' life and also baptism's impact on our lives as Christians. In the homily I shared something that was written by C. S. Lewis. I thought it was a pretty clever way to illustrate the commitment we must make when we are baptized. However,

after the service, while we were getting coffee, Vi came up to me and said “I did not get that story.” She did not have to say that. But because she did, we were able to talk about it a little bit and try to make some sense of it. Vi did not have to do that. She could have walked out of church saying “Huh” and let it go at that, but she did not. And neither should anyone else. We are here to learn and grow, not to just show up. You each deserve to take something home each week that can have an impact on your lives. It may be something new or it may be a reminder. You may even consider it “homework”, but each one of you deserves to take something away with you.

So, with these thoughts in mind, let’s look at today’s lessons and see what we can take with us today when we leave. Today is what is called the Second Sunday of Easter. Last Sunday was Easter, the day we refer to as The Feast of the Resurrection. As we all know, Easter, the day that we celebrate Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead, is of central importance to our faith as Christians.

All this week we have been reading the accounts of Jesus appearing to his disciples after his resurrection. We have read of his interaction with them and being present to them in varying ways. We have read of his speaking to them, teaching them, eating a piece of fish in front of them and we even read that at least one of them was invited to touch his wounds. Before this season of Easter is over we will read and hear of even more accounts of Jesus appearing to and interacting with his followers.

Easter Sunday and these accounts form the very foundation of our faith. These accounts have formed the foundation of the faith of Jesus’ followers for over two thousand years. Where we stand on these accounts can have a very important impact on how we live out our lives as Christians. But some of these lessons may raise some questions in your mind. Questions like we heard expressed in John’s Gospel this morning.

We read that: *“...when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.”*

Now for some reason, Thomas was not with them, and when he heard that the others had seen Jesus, he refused to believe, and for this reason we often hear him referred to as “doubting Thomas”. But don’t forget that a few Sundays ago we heard the story of the raising of Lazarus and we heard this same Thomas say to the other disciples: *“Let us go also that we may die with him.”* Thomas was brave. He was brave, but he had some doubts. What about us? What about you? What about me? Do we ever have doubts?

Listen to Professor William Barclay describe Thomas and the doubts that he expressed:

*“(Thomas) absolutely refused to say that he understood what he did not understand, or that he believed what he did not believe. There is an uncompromising honesty about him. He would never still his doubts by pretending that they did not exist...it is doubt like that which in the end arrives at certainty...”*

Thomas had his doubts, and he said so. But in the end he was able to say: *“My Lord and my God.”* And we also may have doubts from time to time. But never forget Jesus’ words to Thomas: *“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* And we just heard Peter say to the new Christians: *“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible joy...”*

It is “ok” to have questions and doubts. And if they come, it is important to acknowledge them and to pray about them. And it is important to remember, that the rest of us are here to help address them, and to help work through them. And never forget, Thomas’s questions were answered.

The second thing to take away comes from our second lesson. We heard Peter’s words written to a group of Christians who are beginning their new life of faith in Jesus and his resurrection. After expressing the joy that both Peter and these Christians are feeling, Peter reminds them of something important that we each need to keep in mind as we go forward. Peter writes:

*“In this (new faith) you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith...may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”*

J. B. Phillips was an Anglican priest and was made a Canon of Salisbury Cathedral, in England. He was highly acclaimed for his translation of *“The New Testament in Modern English”*. He wrote something that we all need to keep in mind as we seek to grow spiritually, as we seek to become the individuals that God has created us to be. As we do our daily reading, as we reach out to be “Instruments of Peace”, as we take on other disciplines during Advent and Lent, and as you meet as a Ladies Group, keep these words of J.B. Phillips in mind. He writes:

*“As in every evolutionary process, including the growth of a normal human being, there is a force which pulls upwards. But there is also a force making for relapse and regression.”*

*“We must not be surprised to find a man whose eyes have been opened to spiritual reality experiencing, again and again, reactionary forces within himself. He is, I believe, being drawn to a higher level of human living, a greater awareness, and a greater responsibility. But, in the nature of things, there will inevitably be a pull-back to the former, more comfortable, mode of non-committed thinking and feeling. Phillips continues:*

*“It appears to me, comparing my own experience with that of many friends, that once one has seriously enlisted on the side of God and his purpose, considerable spiritual opposition is provoked and encountered. Pull-back is real! Quite apart from one’s own tendency to regress...the Christian finds himself attacked by nameless spiritual forces...it is highly significant to me to find that, in every case of a person becoming a Christian of*

*which I have personal knowledge, this sense of spiritual opposition is experienced, and sometimes felt very keenly.”*

As we each continue along our spiritual journeys, remember that both doubts and testing will come. They are not unusual. They are to be expected. They are to be prayed about and when possible shared, so that together we will continue on our journeys to become the people that God has created us to be.

AMEN