

Sometimes life in real time intrudes on scripture passages. This is one of those times. We learned before week's end last week that our dear sister in Christ, Lilian, had returned to her maker. Death is always a shock even if there's plenty of warning. In this case there was no warning at all. Even though Lilian had struggled with her health for years, she was always resolute in doing as much as she could and as well as she could for as long as she could. And there was certainly nothing wrong with the way she assessed what was happening around her nor was she reticent about expressing her opinion. Lilian joined our Vestry this year and we were fortunate to have her. She asked good questions that prompted us to make wise decisions. She will be sorely missed by so many of us who have been worshipping with her for decades. We watched her raise her daughters and we took delight in her grandchildren and we helped along the way as best we could. Even though her body failed her from time to time, she was determined to do as much as she could for as long as she could. Her faith was strong and it was very important to her. It seems quite appropriate that she should leave this earth on the first week after the resurrection. We will surely miss her physical presence, but we will feel her warmth and her spirit and her strong and unwavering faith for many years to come.

It seems appropriate now for us to turn our attention to what our Lord Jesus had to say about death and dying as we struggle with this fresh experience with death in our midst. We are only in the Second Sunday of the Easter season, so we are still savoring all that Jesus taught us while he was with us after his resurrection. Those who followed him and lived with him are the ones who learned from him first hand about what had happened to him and about what we could expect when we encountered death once more. But not all the disciples got the same news and the same instruction at the same time. One of them was absent from their gathering after the crucifixion. One of them was left out.

At some point in your life, you must have been in a situation where you felt left out. Maybe it was when you were growing up and something happened in your family that everyone was privy to except you. Maybe it was some decision made by your parents that affected everyone in the whole family, but you were the only one not there to voice your opinion. How easy was it for you to accept the decision that was made without you? This decision is going to affect the whole family and you didn't have the chance to put in your 2 cents worth. Whatever happened, happened without you and you are left to figure out how you're going to respond to a family decision that was made in your absence! How did it feel to be left out?

Such is the dilemma of the disciple Thomas on this second Sunday of Easter. For whatever reason he's been left out of the most crucial experience that any of the disciples had ever had. We don't know *why* he wasn't with the others. They were hiding behind a locked door to protect themselves from the Jews who might very well be planning to crucify each of them now that they believed they had destroyed Jesus. The disciples had seen Jesus' gruesome death on the cross and they were heartbroken, frozen with fear, and emotionally spent. They were leaderless and didn't know which way to turn or what to do next. That locked door was the only thing that stood between them and imminent disaster. Under these circumstances...on the evening of his resurrection...Jesus appeared to them behind the locked doors and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he showed them his hands and his side...and the disciples rejoiced because they knew it really *was* their teacher and friend. Again, he said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I send you. He said, "Peace be with you again" and then he commissioned them. He breathed on each one of them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit!" He gave them their authorization and commissioned them by saying: "If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any they are retained." The words from Jesus...the Peace offered them and the commission given them provide them with a roadmap for the future. And it's a roadmap his present-day followers are still using. Jesus' disciples have some idea now what they are supposed to do to keep Jesus and Jesus' message alive in the world. The breath that was breathed on them by Jesus is the Holy Spirit given to them by God to take into the world. All the senses are in play here: sight, sound, speech, taste, and touch...and Thomas has been left out of it all. The breath of the Holy Spirit holds such import. As God breathed into a creature of dust and humanity first came to life, so here the Christ enlivens these disciples with the pneuma...the breath of God....and Thomas isn't there.

A week later, the disciples were again in the house with the door locked and this time Thomas *was* with them. The disciples had told them about Jesus' visitation to them and his breathing the pneuma on them. They were filled with such enthusiasm, but Thomas wasn't as impressed. He couldn't believe that Jesus could be alive again after what every one of them had seen at the crucifixion. It just wasn't possible, but the other disciples were adamant...and they had all seen Jesus and had all been breathed on by Jesus. Thomas dug in his heels and swore to all of them that unless he could see the mark of the nails in Jesus' hands and the open wound in his side, he *would not believe*. His skepticism earned him the nickname Doubting Thomas and that nickname follows him to this day. But he wasn't asking for anything that the other disciples hadn't already been privy to.

Stop and think for a minute. Jesus' reunion with the disciples had been the week *before* on Easter night. That was a whole week ago. Thomas was making some pretty specific demands

about what it would take for him to believe that whoever it was the disciples had seen the week before was actually Jesus. Instead of Doubting Thomas, he might be more accurately described as rational Thomas or Realistic Thomas. When Jesus assented to let him touch and feel everything he needed to touch and feel to reassure himself that it really *was* Jesus, Jesus let him do just that. All of a sudden Thomas no longer *needed* to touch Jesus' wounds. His eyes and his heart were opened by Jesus' willingness to make himself available to Thomas and vulnerable to him just as he had with the other disciples. Jesus wasn't holding anything back. His openness made it that much easier for Thomas to be satisfied. Suddenly, Thomas had been caught up to date with the rest of the disciples. It no longer mattered that he had been 'left out' the first time around. Now he was as convinced as all the rest of them were.

This past week, we received a message from Bishop Porter Taylor in his Clergy letter to the Diocese that gave a unique description of this phenomenon we call 'Easter.' This is what he said:

[The following is taken from Bishop Porter Taylor's Clergy letter to the Diocese:]

"The Resurrection is not a single event, but a loosening of God's power and light into the earth and history that continues to alter all things, infusing them with the grace and power of God's own holiness. It is as though a door was opened and what poured out will never be stopped, and the door cannot be closed...." Sister Joan Chittister, who is always wise about everything, reminds us of how misguided we are to limiting Easter to a day or a one-time occurrence.

"What if we stopped thinking of Easter as a day or even as a season and instead thought of it as God's ongoing activity?"

Therefore, Bishop Taylor says, "I need to cease thinking about what I can do to cause transformation, which is almost nothing, and instead remember what God has done, is doing, and will do, which is everything."

Bishop Taylor went on to say, "I remember when God has 'eastered' in my life: the times when the seemingly impossible became possible. I remember these events and remember that the "loosening of God's power and light into the earth and history" has altered my life and "infused [it] with the grace and power of God's own holiness."

You probably have had experiences like that in your own life. From this perspective we need to be able to 'see' God's power and marvel in God's power and embrace the transformation that

God causes to take place. From this perspective, God is providing 'resurrection' and 'new life' at every juncture of our lives and for *all* of our lives...and it can't be stopped and it can't be taken away from us. From a human perspective it may feel like we've been left out of some important event that God has created for all of us long, long ago...when in fact, we haven't been left out at all, we just haven't seen it as God's ongoing creation in the world and in our lives. Actually, we have a 'front row' seat if we are only willing to 'see' God at work in our lives and in the world.

The power of the resurrection is continuous....even to this day...and it is never-failing.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN