

Message from the Minister the second week after Easter- Eastertide

Well, that was very different Easter! I was certainly not looking forward to no church service with rousing Easter hymns and hot cross buns shared with friends and a big family gathering with the family. Easter and Thanksgiving are the holidays that we host as Christmas is always at our daughters. The table extension is put in; the table decorated for Easter with flowers and bunnies and decorated eggs. (fake ones now in our senior years). It is a time to which we all look forward.

Surprisingly we found a way to make it almost acceptable this year. We attended church electronically with our family (one daughter singing, the other reading scripture). Later in the day, via messenger, we all had dinner together each in our own homes, but able to see and talk to each other while we ate our separate dinners. Although there was no leaf in the table, it was still decorated for Easter.

I am sure that each of you found unique ways to have some sense of Easter celebration while sheltered in your own homes.

An odd thought did come to me however. As we were at church electronically, I thought about our own church building. I expect that this is the first time in its history and perhaps the history of previous buildings, that there was not a service on Easter Sunday.

Given St. Davids- Queenston's long history, I have no doubt that it endured many difficulties being so close the American border in the War of 1812. Yet it survived and grew and witnessed to many and so shall it in the future.

The lectionary reading for the first Sunday after Easter is from the gospel of John, chapter 20, verses 19-31.

Later that day the disciples had gathered together, but fearful, had locked all the doors of the house. Jesus entered, stood among them and said, "Peace to you." Then he showed them his hands and side.

The disciples, seeing the master with their own eyes, were exuberant. Jesus repeated his greeting, "Peace to you. Just as the Father sent me, I send you."

Then he took a deep breath and breathed into them." Receive the Holy Spirit," he said. "If you forgive someone's sins, they're gone for good. If you don't forgive sins, what are you going to do with them?" But Thomas was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples told him that they had seen the Master. But he said that unless he saw the holes in his hands and put his finger in the holes and stuck his hand in his side, he would not believe it.

Eight days later they were in the same room. This time Thomas was with them. Jesus came through the locked doors and stood among them and said, "Peace to you."

Then he focussed his attention on Thomas. "Take your finger and examine my hands. Take your hand and stick it in my side. Don't be unbelieving. Believe!"

Thomas said, "My master and my God."

Jesus said, "So you believe because you've seen with your own eyes. Even better blessings are in store for those who believe without seeing."

Jesus provided far more God-revealing signs than are written down in this book. These are written down so that you will believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, and in the act of believing, have real and eternal life in the way he personally revealed it. (The Message)

It seems so appropriate at this time that the reading should be about receiving peace. How much most of us, regardless of the good front we put on, would love to receive the gift of peace, if not for ourselves, for those that we love.

This story from the gospel of John tells about the very first Eastertide. The disciples were meeting together in secret, for they were afraid of the religious hierarchy. Every knock on the door, every noise on the step, struck terror into their hearts. They feared that maybe they would be the next to die on a cross. You see there was a very strong possibility that they really would die. They were after all, followers of the one known as the King of the Jews. They could be arrested and executed for treason against Rome. We are told that the doors were locked. We can almost see these disciples sitting there quietly, in prayer, fear and sadness. They realized all too well that the one they loved had been crucified. It looked like things were over. The adventure had ended. They had such great hope. Then it happened! Jesus had been snatched from them and nailed to that cross. They were sad. Their hearts were broken. Their hope was gone.

Thomas was so depressed that he was off alone like a wounded dog licking a hurt leg. He could recall the glorious entry into Jerusalem, the enthusiastic hosannas. Now Jesus was gone. He didn't understand this ending. The curtain had fallen. All that was left was fear and grief.

Thomas was not there when Jesus appeared to the disciples. He doubted their story, he thought they were making it up.

Thomas wasn't a bad person. In fact, he was like most of us, afraid to believe. He had perhaps been disappointed before and didn't want to be hurt again. What if this was some kind of deception? He did not want to take the risk. I can identify with Thomas. Maybe you can too.

We want to see God face to face and then believe. Particularly in times such as these, our faith seems fragile. It's difficult to accept what we cannot see. It's certainly easier to believe when we are in church with the lilies and the music and the pews are full. It's easier to believe when everything is going well in our lives and we are well.

From what looked like a shattered future, a new vision arose among the disciples. Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." From that moment on, they were not on their own. They were and we are sustained by the Spirit to carry out Jesus' ministry in the community.

The disciples were given new breath for their journey, they were given hope for the new life they were about to begin. And we too are the benefactors of that peace and hope.

We have the hope that we are not alone in our present situation and we have the hope that there will be a new day, a new normal where we are never alone, because we believe.

Even better blessings are in store for those who believe without seeing.

And the people said.....

Will you pray with me?

Loving and compassionate God. You are ever present for us in our good times, in our troublesome times and in our desperate times. Jesus said, "In the world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

As we come to you this day in prayer, Holy One, we do so with hope. We see the tulips and the daffodils budding and flowering with the promise of spring. We see the days becoming longer as comes the breath of spring. Light overcomes the darkness of winter. This is your gift of creation and hope.

We thank you for the gift of prayer which is for us a survival tactic: open communication with God who has the power to move into our lives and through our circumstances: which allows us to unload the burdens of the world into your capable hands and plugs us into peace. Prayer is a powerful tool for comfort in the world in which we live.

During Jesus ministry on earth, he showed caring and compassion as he healed people of all ages and stations of life from physical, mental and spiritual ailments.

Be present then Compassionate One now, to those who need your loving touch because of Covid-19. May they feel your healing through the care of Doctors and nurses. May these care givers be renewed in energy and sustained in long shifts. May your protection be on them as they work with their patients.

Comfort those who live with fear and anxiety and feelings of isolation: those who are receiving treatment and those in quarantine. Protect families and friends and bring peace to all who love them. We pray for those more likely than others to become severely ill from Covid-19, the elderly and those with chronic health conditions; be their comfort in this time of uncertainty as well as those who love them and must be isolated from them.

As we seek wisdom daily, be with those making decisions that affect our lives and the future of families, communities and countries worldwide.

We pray that they communicate clearly and truthfully and calmly with each other and with the public and that their messages are received and heeded. May truth and empathy be touchstones of those setting policies for our protection.

Holy One, as we adjust to everyone being at home as businesses and schools are closed, we ask that you guide us in our new realities. Give spouses grace for each other. Prompt worn out, worried parents to speak words of kindness and encouragement to their children. Help children find ways to experience the beauty of all you have created and to continue learning.

We continue to pray for those who work so that we might eat and have the necessities we require: truck drivers clerks, delivery drivers and all others who work in essential services.

Hold all in our community of faith in your loving embrace until we may safely meet again.

We ask in the name of the one who taught us to pray together,
Our Father.....

**Because you live, O Christ,
The Spirit bird of hope is freed for flying,
Our cages of despair
No longer leave us closed and life- denying.**

**The stone has rolled away
And death cannot imprison.
O sing this Eastertide,
For Jesus Christ has risen,
Has risen, has risen, has risen!**

Blessings and hope to all, Rick