



## EASTER PEOPLE

April 23, 2017, Second Sunday of Easter

John 20:19-31; I Peter 1:3-9

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*God of Salvation, You have written into our hearts the Word of Life, and the Word is Jesus Christ. Through Christ we have redemption that leads to eternal life. We hear this news and we come as we are: doubting Thomases and preaching women, fearful disciples, sorrowing exiles, and rejoicing psalmists! You, O God, come to us as you are: Risen Christ, Christ of peace, Holy Spirit, Spirit of forgiveness, God of life, and God of new birth! Breathe through us now, as we listen to your Word and receive Easter joy, so that we may be your faithful disciples. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen*

Several weeks ago the pastors and seminarians were presented with a challenge during our Wednesday colloquium. For those of you who don't know, each Wednesday the pastors at Brick and our three seminarians meet to discuss topics in ministry, such as pastoral care, preaching, weddings and funerals, spiritual disciplines, among many others. This year, we've been joined by the pastor at Church of the Living Hope, Chris Lawrence, and the seminarian our churches share, Robbie Thompson. With five pastors and four seminarians in the room, you can imagine the conversation is rich. Well several weeks ago, our seminarian Sarah Logemann gave a challenge to our group of nine. We called it the "Five Book Canon"—a challenge to reduce the entire canon of Scripture to only five books. We each had to present our case and argue for why our chosen five books were the most important out of the 66 in the Bible. Before I tell you what we decided, think for just a minute. Which five you would choose?

It's hard, right? Well I must admit: we had fun making our cases, debating stories from the Torah, the Wisdom literature, and the prophets. Then there were the New Testament disputes—between the four Gospels, whether or not to include the history of the Church in Acts, and what to do with all of Paul's letters. Michael



reminded us that we weren't the first Christians to have this kind of debate—many have argued before us about which books were the most important in the Bible and which ones were necessary. It was really a lot of fun, to be honest, because it brought forth which books have shaped our faith personally, which authors have been most influential to our ministry, and which stories we think are most foundational to our shared faith. In our final tally, Psalms was a favorite as well as Genesis and Exodus. And out of the four Gospels, Luke and John received the most votes. There were more Old Testament books than New, but the stories of both Israel and her Messiah were important. I should say, for those of you curious about our list, you could still find our actual tallies on the chart paper in the session room or posted on Brick's social media accounts. Hold on to that challenge, because I'll come back to it.

This Sunday, the second Sunday in the 50-day journey of Easter, we find the disciples locked up in a room, guarded and hiding out of fear. Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John have heard the news of the resurrection but I'm sure they're still swimming in confusion and awe. Now we find the rest of the disciples cowering in fear. They've been through incredible trauma, after witnessing their teacher and mentor suffer through trial, humiliation, and death. But they're also drowning in their own pain, because they know they abandoned Jesus when he needed them most. Fear, awe, confusion, guilt, and shame—these are just some of the emotions that are locked up in that room with the disciples.

Yet, in the midst of their pain—Jesus enters the room and offers them his gift of peace. He says it not once, but twice, *Peace be with you*, because he, the one who knows them best, knows what they need in that moment.

Moreover, Jesus offers them a gift greater than peace. By breathing on them, as their resurrected Savior, he gives them the Holy Spirit. As if the appearance of Jesus wasn't overwhelming enough, now he gives the disciples the power to proclaim and heal in his name. In this moment in John's Gospel, the author gives us a mini Pentecost; with the breath of the Spirit, Jesus creates the Church, huddled together in this locked room.



The text from I Peter this morning, affirms this fellowship. The author tells us “*By God’s great mercy God has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*”<sup>1</sup> The author of I Peter wrote these words to those who had never seen Jesus but their lives were changed radically as a result of his resurrection. The letter speaks of a new birth, a new church. Easter people began as a huddled mass of fearful followers, but now they have the breath of the Spirit. The story of Easter has birthed a new creation.

This morning, both texts from John 20 and I Peter 1 affirm that the Easter news creates community. What we might miss about this community, though, is that, in this fragile moment, Jesus creates the Church in the midst of confusion and fear. This locked room is not filled with folks who have it all figured out and are ready to move forward with confidence and pride. This Church, this mini Pentecost that Jesus creates, is filled with those who are afraid, confused, and fearful. Furthermore, Thomas comes along later and says what we’d all be thinking, “Hey, I need some proof!” These followers, Jesus’ eventual ministers of the Gospel, capture where most of us are as Easter people. Some are ready to share the news like Mary Magdalene, some rejoice and believe like Peter and John, others need proof like Thomas. Many are worried about the consequences and realities of following Jesus, and still others are just trying to make sense of it all. Jesus says, “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*”<sup>2</sup> True, true...blessed are any of Jesus’ Easter people as we seek to make sense of this story and follow Jesus into the world.

This past Wednesday’s session meeting is always a favorite night for the pastors and the elders each year. That’s because this past week we were able to spend time with this year’s confirmation class, getting to know each other, asking each other questions about faith and ministry. As everyone shared around the table, we learned from one another about faith and discipleship. More importantly we learned that not one of us has it all figured out. But serving together, in trust and

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<sup>1</sup> I Peter 1:3.

<sup>2</sup> John 20:29.



doubt, is how we journey forward. Confirmation is one way in which our young people commit to that journey, but the journey of faith lived out together is a calling for each of us. Post Easter, we're called to figure out what kind of new creation we will be together, what kind of Easter people we are and how we will share that Good News with others.

Confirmation at Brick Church is a yearlong journey for 8<sup>th</sup> graders, one that is fully realized on the first Sunday of May. But in the early church it was this Sunday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in the season of Easter, that new Christians became fully a part of the Church. Originally, new Christians were baptized on Easter morning, and in the days after, they spent Easter week preparing themselves to fully enter the life and worship of their community. On the second Sunday of Easter, they joined in as full participants in the life of the church, donned in white robes. Weekly worship, Word and sacrament were now a part of their lives as those who were living into resurrection faith as Easter people. Although new and probably still filled with many questions, the second Sunday of Easter was the continuation of their Christian journey.

A friend and former member of this church, Rev. Takako Terino had a great reflection after worship last Sunday that she shared on Facebook. She had spent Easter Sunday worshipping in a church that was out of her comfort zone. She said:

*I went to a neighborhood quasi-mega church for Easter morning service and was amazed how the whole church, from the lyrics of praise songs to the message of the pastor, managed to stay clearly within the boundary drawn by the line of [a certain] atonement theory ... [and] there was no reference to how Jesus "lived" and how that life led to his death and what the defeat of such death might mean.... [Still,] I took the communion with everyone, knowing Jesus was there<sup>3</sup>.*

Although Takako was troubled by the singularity of the message, she shared communion, heard the Good News of Easter, and left with the challenge to live as a follower of the resurrected Jesus.

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<sup>3</sup> Shared with her permission.



In her discomfort Takako shared an important question that we must all ask ourselves this Easter season—what does it mean to be Easter people who follow the resurrected Jesus? What does it look like to take this Good News from last week and share it with others?

So back to the challenge Sarah offered us in colloquium several weeks ago, the “Five Book Canon”. As fun and interesting as the debate was, the truth of the matter is we need ALL those stories, all the books in the Biblical canon. No one can really narrow God’s story of salvation down to just a few books. The truth is...we need all stories and all people. We need writers who have it all figured out and those who still wonder in confusion. We need praise and lament. We need stories that comfort us and stories that discomfort us. We need the formational stories of the Torah, but we also need the troubling stories where we’re not exactly sure if Israel’s behavior was anything resembling holy. We need Job’s deep questions and his annoying, over communicative friends. We need to be humbled by Ruth’s humility and loving kindness. We need King David’s faithfulness and his mistakes. With the Gospels, we need Mark’s urgency, Matthew’s teachings, Luke’s concern for the poor and oppressed, and John’s reminder that Jesus IS the light of the world.

My friends, a challenge for Christians post Easter is thinking that we can get through any of the trials and joys of life as Easter people without all of these stories, without all of the experience and wisdom each of us brings to the table. Easter is a story for us all, no matter where we are on the journey. We need doubters, those questioning, those self-assured, those young and old. We need the voices of those in lament, those in joy, those who’ve struggled, and those who rest in peace. We need the trusting, those ready to praise, and the skeptics. We need the faithful and those who’ve strayed. We need those with and those without. As we look back to that locked room that Jesus entered, all of these types of people were among the Easter people there, and they’re still here today.

As people who follow the resurrected Christ, each of us brings a unique set of stories and experiences to the table. We need each other, because without each



other, we become lost in our own singular perspectives, never being challenged to see that the Gospel is beyond our own thoughts and opinions. Because the biggest sin we could commit post Easter is thinking that we have it all figured out; the disciples certainly didn't, and they were there. The miracle is resurrection, certainly, but it's also that in the midst of their confusion, fear, and wonder—these diverse disciples became proclaimers of the Good News. They became Easter people and so can we.

Friends, this morning when you look around at others in the pews, or within yourself and find bewilderment, awe, joy or sadness, know that it is among all of us that the risen Christ resides. Wherever you find yourself on the journey, my friends, proclaim the Good News of Easter.

*In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*