Second Sunday of Easter April 11, 2021

All Saints’ Year B

Acts of the Apostles 4:32-35 I John 1:1-2:2

Psalm 133 John 20:19-31

We thank you dear Lord for all the ways you easter within us. AMEN.

Notice in our gospel story this morning that Jesus is recognized by his wounds. “See here, touch my side, put your finger into my nailed hand.” And the disciples do just that and rejoice; they recognize Jesus. They know him by his wounds.

Jesus is passing through a wall and breaking down barriers; he is also breaking down the disciples’ fear. They see him and are so relieved of so many things- not only their fear, but their confusion, their doubts, and most certainly their guilt.

Jesus’ rising is about our own rising, a rising that often emerges from our wounds… a rising because of our wounds, not in spite of them.

When you think about our forbearers in faith, we see wounded people. Mary as lost and grieving. Peter as confused and as a betrayer. Apostle Paul as a persecutor, a murderer. And Thomas as doubting. These failings seem to carry the full gamut of human emotions, taking in the full spectrum of our lives.

That’s one of the reasons I like to imagine all of humanity huddled in that upper room with our own hurts, fears, and failings… in our own woundedness…. the newly divorced, the mother anxious about her child’s prognosis, the friend who just lost his job, the man cheating on his taxes, the woman cheating on her husband, the neighbor who is still addicted, the teenageer who buys a gun to kill others, a counselor or priest who betrays confidences, the policeman who keeps his knee on the neck of a dying handcuffed man. Yes, stories of fear and failings.

We’re all crammed into that upper room, like our forbearers in faith, the confused, the betrayers, the persecutors, the murderers, the lost, the grieving, and let’s not forget… the doubters. We’re all there, possible disciples-in-waiting, hiding….

And Jesus appears, not quite like himself, yet identifiable, somehow passing through walls, his wounds exposed, and what does he do?

He doesn’t say, “you’re forgiven,” or point to your failings, our even heal you, things he’s done all throughout his ministry. He says, “Peace be with you.”

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding.

Next, he shows us ***his*** wounds- his pierced hands and side, and then he breathes on us, the Originating Spirit of life, rising up out of his wounds into the flesh and bones of our own wounds.

This breathing moment between Jesus and his disciples always takes me back to Jesus’ baptism. Jesus was 30 years old, and by then, well into his adulthood, even middle age, without a vocation. He still doesn’t really know what his life is about. Some would call him a loser. And yet, as Jesus comes out of the waters, taking his first breath from being under water, God doesn’t tell Jesus what to do.

***God tells him who he is***: his beloved son, with whom he is ***already*** well-pleased. And Jesus hasn’t even done anything yet.

And we haven’t done anything yet, either; we’re just waiting in that room, afraid.

And then Jesus says to us, like a voice breaking out of the clouds, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

***Jesus is telling us who we are***. Jesus breathes on us- the same breath of life that created the world, that animated dry bones, that unshackled him from the tomb.

I was talking with a friend of mine this week who is a spiritual director, and he said that one of his directees asked him a great question. “Once Jesus breathed his last, on the cross, where did his breath go?… It had to be somewhere before it returned with him. Where did Jesus’ breath reside before it enters into the upper room?”

What a great question. The best answer comes to us from John O’Donohue when he shares with us his Celtic understanding of our expansive soul. I was always taught that we have a soul. Well, actually we don’t have a soul; we are a soul. Yet, even with that understanding I have always imagined the soul residing in the body. No…. actually, the body…. our bodies reside in the Soul. Our Soul. That’s were Jesus’ breath went… it resided in his soul until the opportune time.

The implication points to the unbelievable, unnamable connections we have we each other, with the cosmos, the earth, the past, the future, God, redemption, love, and hope.

Against this backdrop of the gift of our connectedness…. The good news….Thomas hears the witness of the disciples and says, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

And then Jesus leans forward, enters into Thomas’ upper room, the rooms within our souls that are closed off. We’re shut up within an interiority that keeps Jesus’ kiss of love and life at bay.

Jesus comes, wounds and all, to free us from the closed off upper room of our own wounds and fears and anxiety, assuring us always. By his wounds, he has healed us. By our own wounds, we heal others. Jesus is about transforming the way we see.

My father, a very complex man, was wounded by the Korean War. Barely 20, he was drafted into the war and stationed at a MASH unit. Much later in life, did I realize that he suffered from PTSD, daily, over the horrors he witnessed and experienced. He never fully recovered.

My father said racist things. Even as a young child, I knew they were wrong, and I was ashamed. And yet, as an owner of a restaurant near a military base, he took care of his employees and young enlisted men who often were people of color. He brought them home for a meal, especially around Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. He gave advances that he knew would not be paid back. He went to court to defend. He listened. He took risks. He gave the benefit of the doubt, even after betrayals. And he never talked about it. I learned these things from the strangers who loved him. Who would stop me on the street to tell me about my father giving away hope.

A few days before my mother died, she gave my sister and me permission to read the love letters my father had written to her while stationed in Korea. After the funeral, now both parents gone, my sister and I, over a bottle of wine, read the love letters. We cried, we laughed, and we mourned. One story that wove over a few weeks of letter exchanges revolved around my father’s request for my mother to send his one and only suit to the military base. One of the young Korean doctors was about to graduate from Med School and my father wanted him to be able to have the suit, as a gift. My mother managed to find the suit and to send it to him in time.

My father would have given his eye teeth to become a doctor. Yet, he knew, as a man who hadn’t finished high school, that would never happen. But here he was doing all that he could to honor his fellow comrade in arms, a Korean. Putting aside his own dreams to love another, freely.

To this day, I don’t know why my father said so many racist things. Part of his wounding, I guess. Yet, out of those wounds he was also able to give, to see in new ways, to hope, and to believe.

Jesus breaks through into our upper rooms, breathes on us, and redeems, with no consideration of our worthiness. We are not only Thomas’ twin, but Jesus’ twin as well. And we live out of the breath of both lives. By the grace of God, we sometimes breathe more with Jesus and walk in his wake. But it matters not, as God believes in us anyway. It is God’s belief in us, that gives us the courage to see, to trust, to do justice, and to love kindness, and to take the next walking step with humility.

Happy Easter.