

Sermon, April 16, 2023 (Easter 2A)

https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Easter/AEaster2_RCL.html

St. Mark's Episcopal Church, ABQ, NM

Sylvia Miller-Mutia, Associate Rector

The second Sunday of Easter should be an extra special Feast Day for people in the Episcopal Church. If the first Sunday of Easter grants us a special opportunity each year to remember and honor Saint Mary Magdalene—the first witness to Christ's Resurrection, apostle to the apostle— and with her, all unlikely and misunderstood pioneers and prophets (especially women); then this second Sunday of Easter grants us a special opportunity each year to remember and honor Saint Thomas, and with him all those who receive enthusiastic pronouncements from others with caution, if not outright skepticism—which is, I think, a great many people in the Episcopal Church. And not only in the Episcopal Church, of course. The whole, universal, “capital C” Church is in fact *full* of faithful members who are no strangers to doubt.

The fact that Christian tradition dubs Saint Thomas both “The Doubter” and the “The Twin” reminds me of one of my favorite verses from Lebanese poet Khalil Gibran, who was, himself, raised a Maronite Catholic. Gibran once wrote: “***Doubt is a pain too lonely to know that faith is his twin brother.***”

Beautiful isn't it? The idea that Doubt and Faith are intimate siblings....they are carried and nourished and born together...they come into the world from the same Mother's womb.

“Doubt is a pain too lonely to know that faith is his twin brother.”

Bay Area writer Ann Lamott, a member of a Presbyterian Church, expresses a similar sentiment in more prosaic terms when she writes: “***The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty.***”

Lutheran Theologian & Philosopher Paul Tillich expresses the idea in more philosophical language, for those of you with a more intellectual bent, when he writes: “*“[Faith] is not an arbitrary leap into darkness but a decision in which elements of immediate participation and therefore certitude are mixed with elements of strangeness and therefore incertitude*

*and doubt. **But doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith.** Therefore, there is no faith without risk.”*

And for you contemplatives: Franciscan Priest and Teacher Richard Rohr, who founded the Center for Action and Contemplation right here in ABQ, expresses this same theme in yet another way, relying on biblical and archetypal images when he writes: **“The opposite of faith is not doubt; the opposite of faith is control.** You must leave the Garden, where there are angels with flaming swords to keep you from ever really returning. You must leave the womb to be born.”

“The opposite of faith is not doubt; the opposite of faith is control. (Rohr)

Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith (Tillich)

The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty.” (LaMott)

“Doubt is a pain too lonely to know that faith is his twin brother.” (Gibran)

The Second Sunday of Easter provides an annual invitation for all of us to lovingly embrace doubt, both in ourselves and in others, as Faith’s intimate and inseparable partner.

The Gospel reminds us, it is in space doubt creates—which may also be spaces of fear, of isolation, of loneliness, of skepticism, of uncertainty, of danger, of risk, of lack of control, and also creativity—it is in the space doubt creates, that the Risen Christ meets us, bringing us the Divine Gifts of Peace and God’s Spirit.

Doubt is no longer so lonely a place, when it’s the place that our Risen Lord meets us.

In Today’s Gospel we read:

*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week ..., Jesus came and stood among the disciples and said, **“Peace be with you.”**.... Then Jesus said to them again, **“Peace be with you.***

This isn't the first time we see Jesus meeting his disciples in their doubt and anxiety and offering to give them the gift of his peace.

In fact, tradition suggests, the last time Jesus met his disciples in this Room it was to share one Last Supper with them, before his arrest and execution. After that supper, right before they left the safety of that upper room for the dark uncertainty of that deadly night, Jesus said to his disciples:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. (John 14:27)

Not as the world gives, indeed!

In today's Gospel, the Risen Christ shows up unannounced in that same Upper Room, to say again to these same disciples who shared in that Last Supper with him, then saw him crucified, dead, and buried:

"Peace be with you.

Peace be *what????* It's no wonder the text tells us Jesus has to repeat himself.

"Peace be with you.

The Risen Christ comes to meet his disciples right in the center of their pain and loneliness, and fear, and doubt, and *in that* place He offers the gift of His peace. It is in that place that the Risen One comes to meet us, too.

"Peace be with you.

Then, Jesus says to them, "**As the Father has sent me, so I send you.**"

Not only does the Risen Christ come *into* a space of uncertainty and doubt to meet his disciples. It is *from* that place of uncertainty and doubt that Jesus sends them out, to continue the work he began in the world. It is from that place that the Risen One sends us out, too.

Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

And though they must surely have felt radically unprepared—as do we—, with his next breath (literally) Jesus gives them everything they will need.

When he had said this, Jesus breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

The Risen Christ comes to meet us in our doubt. And from our place of uncertainty and unknowing he sends us. But not before he breathes into us his very own breath—the Breath of God—the Breath of new life. Were we filled up with certainty, we'd have no room to receive it. But because we've been emptied—of certainty and control—, we can take in that breath. And with that breath we receive the power of the Spirit of God.

It is The Risen One's Breath, and Peace and Spirit, flowing through our unknowing—through the open space in our heart that's created by doubt—that enables us to go wherever God sends us

It is The Risen One's Breath, and Peace and Spirit, flowing through our unknowing—through the open space in our heart that's created by doubt—

That enables us to forgive

It is The Risen One's Breath, and Peace and Spirit, flowing through our unknowing—through the open space in our heart that's created by doubt—

That enables us to risk taking that next step, or turn, or leap of faith into the new, Resurrected Life, to which we are called.

This Eastertide, may we lovingly embrace spaces of doubt
In ourselves and in others

Even as we daringly embrace the peace, the call, the breath and the power of the Risen Christ Who meets us there and sends us out.

Alleluia. Amen.
