



2nd Sunday of Easter

Sermon by Revd Sharmain James



7 April 2024

READINGS

Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1—2:2; John 20:19-31

From Disorientation to Resurrection Reorientation

We are a week on from Easter Sunday but for the disciples in our Gospel reading this morning – it is still Easter day. The scene of 20:19–29 takes place on the evening of the same day as Mary’s experience of Jesus in John 20:11–18. Instead of being outside the tomb, however, the disciples are hiding inside, behind locked doors, for fear of the Jews. They are reeling from the crucifixion of Jesus, traumatized and afraid, and struggling to make sense of the reports that Jesus has been seen.

Things with Jesus had been going so well up until that week. His entrance into Jerusalem had been picture perfect— But by Friday, he was dead. Nailed to a cross. Put into a tomb. And even after Mary Magdalene testified to the other disciples about seeing the risen Jesus face-to-face, they were still not convinced. They were so deep into the pit of despair that they could not believe her proclamation. So they hid out behind locked doors. This scene stands in stark contrast to the scene of resurrection.

Walter Brueggemann penned a phrase for the disciples’ kind of spiritual pit. He calls it a place of disorientation - a place of chaos and disorder. He goes on to say that we all go through seasons of: Orientation, in which everything makes sense in our lives but then things change and we find ourselves in a season of disorientation, in which we feel we have sunk into the pit. As we come to term with it we move into a season of reorientation, in which we realize that God has lifted us out of the pit and we are in a new place. Jesus’ disciples had a time of orientation as they followed Jesus, listening to his teaching and preaching, and watching him do miracles. They learned what it meant to follow Jesus as the Messiah and live in the kingdom of God here and now. But their understanding of what it meant for him to be the Messiah was distorted as they believed he would be crowned a political king of Israel. The crucifixion was a crisis of faith that moved them from a season of orientation to a season of disorientation - as their expectation, hopes, and dreams for the future were dashed.

We find this experience of disorientation all throughout scripture. Job lived in it. The prophet Jeremiah wrestled with it. The psalms of lament are full of it. Even Jesus himself cried out from the Pit on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” That night, that Easter evening, the disciples joined their biblical ancestors in that place of disorientation. In some way or another, we all know that feeling. We find ourselves in this place, referred to in the Psalms as “the Pit”. When it seems like we have lost control over our own lives, when we feel trapped. We end up in the pit when the doctor gives us the bad news or we lose our job or even because of something like a hurtful word or when feedback feels more like criticism. And for many of us, we find ourselves in this place of disorientation because of the state of our world now.

When we go through “disorienting” events in our life we can be fearful of the future, locking ourselves away, grieving the loss of the past. But Jesus wants to lead his followers out of disorientation to a resurrection reorientation, a new life. In a time of disorientation and uncertainty, the disciples struggle to take in the Easter good news. So Jesus finds them where they are, and where we are, and he breathes the Holy Spirit upon them – and us. Then he says. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you. By breathing the Holy Spirit upon this frightened community, Jesus invites the disciples to share in his resurrection and calls them from the tomb into abundant life. A new way of being, - an Easter way of being, - was given to them, - and they all rejoiced; they all felt whole again.

Almost all. By the time Thomas enters the story, he realizes the other disciples had already received what they needed from Jesus. They had already received his breath, his commissioning, his peace. Their time of disorientation was over. But Thomas’s wasn’t. He had been out of the room when Jesus appeared to his friends, and he did not experience the risen Jesus for himself.

Without that experience, Thomas realized he could not believe the testimony of his friends. He found himself still in that place of disorientation. A place of chaos and disorder. A few days later - Jesus came to him, held out his hands, and met him where he was—right there in that place of brokenness - in that place of disorientation. Thomas cried out with the strongest faith confession of any of them: “My Lord, and my God.” He moved from being disorientated to being transformed. Or as Revd. Brenda Hoffmann, a Presbyterian priest puts it, “He moved from being Good Friday-shaped, into being hope-shaped, Easter-shaped”.

For the disciples, resurrection reorientation led to transformed lives. The difference we see in the disciples is remarkable. Their changed lives are one of the greatest evidences for the resurrection. So we see that this season of disorientation – became one of the most transformational times for the disciples. By breathing the Spirit in, the disciples grow as a community for mission.

By the time we get to Acts, which we can presume doesn’t take place much more than a year or two later, the same disciples are running a Christian base community — reportedly of thousands of people — complete with worship and prayer, health care and healing, shared property, and resources for all in need. Even more stunning, this community is described by the writer of Acts as being “of one heart and soul,” unified by the presence of the Holy Spirit and the power of the resurrection.

When our oriented lives give way to disorientation, when we are not sure which way is up - - - Jesus enters the chaos and He speaks words of life. They don’t return us to our previous state of being, but they reorient us to a new way, a deeper and more profound way of being in this world. As we continue our journey through this Easter Season, may we see the risen Lord who gets behind our locked doors. As he meets us where we are, even in the middle of our fear and pain of loss, may our faith grow as he encounters us, helping us to move forward in newness.

This new orientation in Jesus is where we find life – abundant overflowing life. It’s where we find that we are “double-blessed.”

Amen