

Easter II, April 18, 2004

1. Easter

The first Easter was not the stuff of drama and entertainment.

It was silent.

Nothing is more powerful than God's silence. His most important works were all done in silence. No one saw it.

Mary's annunciation, Jesus' incarnation: God breaks free and crosses the threshold of heaven and plants a seed in flesh and blood, total and awesome silence.

Jesus' side, water and blood, it is a font of life that has still not dried up but is still giving life, total silence.

Resurrection, no trumpets or earthquakes, finding a turned aside stone was a complete surprise.

For the disciples, it was the first day. It was not a time of joy, Easter finery, family dinners or great music. Fear, terror, doubt were the order of the day. They were locked away from the world, hidden, in both darkness and silence.

Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you," he says, and he shows them his wounds. This is an image that fills me with a bit of wonder and trepidation. In essence I do the same thing on these Retrouvaille weekends.

2. He breathed on them.

How did he do this? What did it look like? How do you breathe on someone?

John's Gospel has this wonderful attachment to the book of Genesis. From the very "beginning" words he uses significant words and phrases from Genesis so that we might hear and understand perfectly well what he was talking about.

In mind, memory, heart and emotion the disciples were drawn back instantly to the first creation as the spirit hovered over the waters. The earth was without form, empty, darkness over the surface of the deep.

They saw: There was no darkness as deep as this, the loss, the hurt, the chaos, the last bit of life had been squeezed and crushed from their broken hearts. There was no future, just emptiness and void.

So the Spirit hovered over the deep darkness. He breathed on them and creation *happened* again.

3. The first creation had held a condemnation. We were expelled from glory. Trying to be God and failing, we were dismissed.

This may have been a real part of their mixture of fear and terror. They had fled, abandoned him, and had been unfaithful. They had denied and betrayed him and disappeared into that primordial darkness of fear that is darker than death itself.

Yet for them he was a breath of fresh air.

It was not simply forgiveness he offered, but the power to share that forgiveness with others.

The son of man has power on earth to forgive sins.

The controversy that Jesus started when the scribes and the Pharisees had challenged him that only God could forgive sins remains to this day.

But Jesus clearly handed this to his apostles, our elder brothers, so that his presence among us would remain both personal and physical in the Sacrament. Flesh and blood is so important to us.

Regardless of what is felt or heard in the heart, you can hear with human ears a human voice with the laying on of hands, and still with human breath, “your sins are forgiven.”

The “I’m OK, You’re OK” world does not want us to focus on sins, yet we are sinners. We are broken, prone to darkness and the chasing of shadows. This sacrament remains as real and physical as the sacrament of marriage or even this bread and wine.

The “I’m OK, You’re OK” world does not want us to focus on sins. They think it might promote low self esteem. But this laying on of hands and breathing the words of forgiveness is about belonging.

I know who laid hands on me, my parents and grandparents and great grand parents representing all my ancestors who have gone before me in faith. I know who laid hands on me, I know the bishop personally, and the names of all the bishops who came before him for more than six hundred years, and the many nameless ones going all the way back to Jesus laying hands on the apostles and breathing over them. I know their names and their histories, it is a remarkable list of sinners and saints but it connects me in a singular way with the apostles and with Jesus himself.

So when I breathe on you and speak to you, it is from Jesus himself. He sent me.

4. Doubt

The world doubts this. There are all sorts of thoughts, opinions and judgments about the forgiveness of sins. Is it real? Is it necessary? But doubt does not scare me anymore.

Thomas doubted. (Show me.)

Mary Magdalene. (Was he stolen?)

Peter. (He had no clue, he saw nothing)

John. (He did not understand what rising from the dead meant.)

Two on the road to Emmaus. (The testimony of women?)

Belief is not seeing, but doubt that has gone searching.

Mary Magdalene kept looking, Peter and John kept looking, Thomas challenged the disciples and returned to be challenged by the Lord. Belief here is exploring the wounds.

Jesus presents his body, he presents his wounds, and he offers us his suffering. Not just water and spirit, but water and *blood*. It was flesh and life, life in the body. We can scarcely imagine. Belief has consequences, not just for the mind, but for the flesh and blood. The Consequence of this weekend is that we are called to forgive.

5. Belief

Doubt turns to belief but it has more to do with where our feet go than with what our mind understands. Belief means community, sharing of goods, care for one another, mutual dignity and honor.

Our Liturgy here, not just for the mind and the heart, but in fire and water, in oil and in laying on of hands, in bread and wine, and of a risen savior who breathes over you and bids you participate in his forgiveness of sins.

Doubt is not the end. Everything begins with doubt. Darkness is not the end; it is the beginning.

6. Where the feet go...

- a. This doubt must go searching. So we must go searching.
- b. Explore the wounds. Do not be afraid.
- c. Know that he has laid his hands on you, that he has breathed on you and given you the ability to forgive each other.