

John 20:19-31 2 Easter 4/23/17 Pastor Bill Uetricht

I don't think I told you this portion of my story, but Bev never agreed to go on a date with me until--believe it or not--I gave her a bottle of tonic water. It was then that I just schwepped her off her feet!

You would agree with me that there are a variety of styles of humor. You just experienced one style—you know, the kind that gives us jokes that produce deep and profound belly laughter. And I like that kind of humor. But I also like more subtle humor. I value the humor of irony. I appreciate the kind of humor that isn't so much "ha-ha" humor but the type that causes you to smile and say: "Isn't that just like us Lutherans; Isn't that just like us men; Isn't that just like us human beings?"

It's that kind of humor that I experience in our gospel reading for today. The apostles have just experienced the most remarkable, life-changing, world-altering reality—the resurrection of Jesus—and they respond by locking themselves up behind closed doors. One would think that resurrection might free you from anxiety and fear. You would think that if death had been conquered you wouldn't find yourself hibernating with a bunch of your scared friends in a secluded closet. This action on the part of the apostles is a bit ironic to me. But isn't it just like us human beings?

Isn't it just like us? Hear good news. Receive good news, the kind of news that makes our fears seem so petty and unnecessary, but then resort to the same old, same old—locking ourselves up behind closed doors. Fear and anxiety—they are our default setting sometimes.

I don't mean to laugh at anxiety. It is very real. And some people, the psychologists and the physicians are telling us, have it as a part of their chemistry. It's what their bodies move toward. I don't want to downplay or belittle that. In fact, I think people with anxiety conditions need our compassion. But you have to admit that anxiety as a default setting is almost funny. How many times do you make it through

something once again only to start worrying about the next thing? Anxiety and fear are often where we go when we don't know where else to go, where we go just because it's where we've always gone. And since we so often go there, we tend not to laugh much, we often get so doggone serious, we become increasingly crabby as we age, resisting change. Sometimes to embrace laughter, to welcome change requires us to move beyond the default setting of anxiety. Anxiety runs from humor; it flees change.

The amazing and somewhat humorous thing in our gospel reading for today is that anxiety and fear don't keep Jesus out. The disciples work hard to keep everybody out, but they can't keep Jesus out. Voila! He's here. Somehow he busts through the doors of anxiety, and then says to them: "Anxiety be gone. Peace, shalom be with you. So knock it off. And since you humans are so prone to the default setting of anxiety, I'll say it again, knowing that you probably didn't get it the first time: 'Peace be with you.' The very opposite of what you are experiencing I give you. I give you that which takes care of anxiety. And by the way, the shalom that I give you is a peace that understands why you are so afraid, why you are so anxious. See my hands. Explore the depths of my side. The one who is raised is the one who was wounded. This isn't cheap hope, in other words. This is hope rooted in real life, experienced in woundedness. This is hope that comes on the other side of life's brutality."

And then the story tells us, this Jesus who couldn't be stopped by locked doors gets into the faces of the disciples. He gets close and personal with them, breathing on them. Just as God had breathed on a bag of bones that God had created at the beginning, giving them life, Jesus breathes on his disciples, giving them (the church) new life. "Receive the Holy Spirit, the holy breath," he says. "Your focus isn't going to be here behind locked doors. Your focus is going to be out there among people whose lives are messed up, people who are trusting all the wrong things. Your focus will be about bringing

forgiveness to them, or if they don't like this forgiveness, allowing them to continue in the misery that they have been living in."

Isn't this just like Jesus? The disciples are hibernating behind closed doors, and he kicks them out the door. They are withdrawing, and he gives them something to do. Sometimes it's being given something to do, being propelled forward into the world that moves us off of our couches, gets us out from behind closed doors, calls us out of our anxiety and fear.

Amazingly, the apostles must not get what Jesus is up to, since, as John tells us, on the next Sunday they are meeting again with the doors closed. Maybe they've grown a little because this time the doors aren't locked; they are just shut. But still, they are huddling in their little groups behind doors that are shut. Isn't that just like us? We are slow to learn. We keep locking our doors, even if just last week we had been pushed out from behind closed doors. But again, the locked doors don't keep Jesus out. Poof! He pops back into our midst again. He shows us up again where the apostles are meeting. And *again* he says, "Knock it off; peace be with you!" This time he gets quite serious in addressing *us*—us who are named "Thomas," the one who for some reason wasn't at the first meeting.

I often wonder why Thomas wasn't there at the first meeting. What would have been so important that he would have missed what seemed to be such an important gathering? Was his wife having a baby? Were his kids involved in a tournament for a traveling soccer team? Was he so overtaken by his fascination for his new I-phone that he lost track of time? Was Wal-Mart running a special on bananas that week? What's the deal? Why wasn't Thomas there? Who knows? But we do know that Jesus doesn't chastise him for his absence, as many of us are prone to do. Jesus doesn't seem to care about his absence. And he probably doesn't care about *your* absence. Frankly, you and I are probably Thomas' twins. We, like him, weren't there when the raised Jesus appeared. And Jesus doesn't care. He just shows up again and says one more time, "Peace be with you." Maybe he is appearing this

time just for Thomas. Maybe he's showing up just for you. Maybe for you he shows up and says: "Peace; knock all the anxieties off!"

This story from John is so encouraging. The risen Christ just keeps showing up. We lock the doors and hunker down. We get more than a bit pathetic in our closed-in-ness, but the risen Christ just keeps popping up in our midst. He just keeps showing up. And he keeps sending us out: "Get the heck out of here! Receive the very energy of me, an energy that propels you outward, an energy that has to do with forgiveness—that which can restore the joy and the delight of life, that which brings people together, controlled not by the past but empowered by the possibilities of the future, that which gets us beyond the need for constant seriousness, that which enables us to laugh not timidly, but with great abandon.

You'd think that God might just give up on us all. You'd think that he might just let us stay locked up behind closed doors. But God doesn't. He just keeps coming. He keeps breaking into our hard-hearted, fear-mongering seriousness with the laughter that flows from the peace that he gives.

"Go ahead; make my day!" Laugh!! Unlock the doors! Let go of some of that anxiety! Give into the one who just keeps showing up!