Easter 2 Year B – April 11, 2021 Rachel Helton (at Shepherd of the Hills)

It was the first day of the week, Peter, who denied even knowing Jesus a few days previously, and another disciple have now seen the empty tomb; Mary has encountered Jesus himself who she knew only after he called her by name. And now we’re told that Jesus has come to be among the disciples, the disciples who are huddled behind locked doors, filled with fear. Jesus says to them “Peace be with you” and he breaths the Holy Spirit upon them, and that Spirit is not just upon them, but *within* them. But someone is missing – Thomas.

After a year of social isolation and quarantining and stay-at-home orders, I can’t help, but to hear this story and wonder where was he? While the rest of the disciples were sheltering together, confused, disappointed, afraid, was Thomas out getting provisions of food and water, was he out carrying on the work of being Jesus’ disciple despite the risks of being associated with the crucified revolutionary? We just don’t know, but the Gospel according to John tells us that Thomas Didymus, Thomas the twin wasn’t there, so he has to hear about this encounter with the Messiah second-hand.

I wonder if he felt left-out, jealous; perhaps he felt like he was in the wrong place at the wrong time and missed out on an opportunity that everyone else had been given. In a way, we are Thomas’ twin, because we too, weren’t there, and yet we hold out for our own encounter with the resurrected Christ. And this is the promise of the resurrection – not just a promise of life, but a promise of relationship with a God who meets us where we are.

Thomas needs to see the wounds on Jesus’ body; he needs to experience the living God through encountering Jesus’ scars. Thomas needs to know that Jesus’ suffering was real and that Jesus will continue to show up in suffering. The resurrection does not suddenly erase suffering, but it does assure us that nothing, not suffering, not fear, not doubt, not confusion, not even a locked door, can keep us from the love of God.

It was a whole week later, we’re told, when Jesus appears to Thomas. I wonder if Thomas’ hope dwindled during that week; he must have wondered if he had missed out forever. We can feel this way too if we start to compare our experiences with God to others around us. We might find ourselves feeling jealous, or even feeling suspicious of someone else’s experience.

Jesus appears again to the disciples and this time Thomas is there, and Jesus does not scold him, or question him, or make any mention of the fact that Thomas’ experience is somehow different than the other disciples, he simply offers his broken body to him, because that is how Thomas enters into relationship with the Christ who has risen from the dead. The broken body, given for Thomas. The broken body, given for you, for me.

In the experience of the broken body, the wounded hands, Thomas can become the hands of Christ in the world, because believing is about more than what one thinks or understands, it is about what one does. And we know from the reading from Acts, that the life of the disciples going forward was a life of *do*ing and of living in a community of radical belonging and radical love of neighbor.

There was suffering in the world then, and there is suffering in the world now. The “Alleluia” of Easter morning does not erase that reality. But praise the Lord, alleluia, that God promises to show up and be with us in life, in all of it. God promises that no one will be left out. Mary needed to encounter Jesus in her confusion and grief, and Jesus met her there and called her by name. The disciples needed to encounter Jesus in their fear, and Jesus met them there with peace, breathing the Holy Spirit into them. Thomas needed to encounter the scarred and broken Jesus who bore the marks of suffering, and Jesus met him there, inviting him into relationship.

No matter where we are, the resurrected Jesus meets us there, affirming that he loves us in all the unique ways that we show up in this world. Jesus did not hide his wounds from Thomas, neither should we try to hide ours from each other or from God. The Hebrew word “hesed” is found repeatedly throughout the Old Testament and is traditionally translated as God’s steadfast love. Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, has suggested an alternative translation for this word – “tenacious solidarity” such that the steadfast love of God is made perfect through the tenacious solidarity with which Jesus desires to be with us. The resurrection is not just a promise of life, but a promise that Jesus will be with us in life, in all of it. Thanks be to God!