

Daily Discipleship

Second Sunday of Easter (A) – John 20:19-31

Discipleship: *An Instrument of Prayer*

Focus Question: *This week how might you be an instrument of prayer?*

word of life

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” John 20:21 (NRSV)

Read John 20:19-31

On the day Jesus rose from the dead, he appears to Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb and sends her as an ambassador to tell the others, “I have seen the Lord.” (John 20:11-18 NRSV) On that same evening, Jesus appears to the disciples even though they are behind locked doors. Despite, or perhaps because of Mary’s proclamation, the disciples are filled with fear of the Jews.

1. *What do you imagine the disciples did, thought, or felt from Easter dawn when Mary talked with Jesus at the tomb until he appeared in the evening to the disciples?*
2. *What might the disciples have been afraid of?*

The first words to the disciples from the resurrected Jesus are, “Peace be with you.” (John 20:19 NRSV) After showing them his hands and side, Jesus repeats those words but adds a mission, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” (John 20:21 NRSV) Then, Jesus gives them the Holy Spirit. They are not sent out into the world by themselves, but are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

3. *What are the disciples sent to do?*
4. *How is peace related to being sent?*
5. *How is the Holy Spirit related to being sent?*

God comes into the lives of disciples in concrete ways. Most certainly, the presence of the crucified and resurrected Jesus with his wounded hands and side is significant, but the disciples are also given God’s peace and God’s Spirit.

Not all the disciples are present to bear witness to the risen Jesus. Thomas in particular wants to see some proof. He can not believe the words of the other disciples or Mary. It takes a week for Thomas to get his concrete proof. Again, Jesus appears in the room although the doors are shut. Once more, Jesus extends peace to his followers. Thomas is allowed to touch Jesus’ wounds. Jesus pleads with Thomas, “Do not doubt, but believe.” (John 20:27 NRSV)

6. *What might have prevented Thomas from believing?*
7. *What about the faith of all those who never get to touch the wounded hands and side of Jesus?*

Jesus recognizes and responds to the limited faith of Thomas by allowing Thomas to touch him. At the same time he praises those who believe without tangible proof. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (John 20:29 NRSV) Jesus blesses the generations who come after the first followers, those who will not be able to physically touch Jesus.

8. *What can be said today to those who have doubts about Jesus?*
9. *What kind of witness might Thomas have become?*

Jesus works with people in different ways depending on their needs. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God transforms fears and doubts into courage and conviction. Followers throughout the ages are encouraged to believe and trust in Jesus Christ.

word *among us*

Reinhold Niebuhr was on the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in New York. In 1943 he was living at his summer home near Heath, Massachusetts when he preached at a small church. He included the following prayer:

O God, give us

Serenity to accept what cannot be changed

Courage to change what should be changed and

Wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

Howard Chandler Robbins asked for a copy and Niebuhr gave him the original. Supposedly, Niebuhr said, "Here, take the prayer. I have no further use for it." Robbins printed the prayer in a pamphlet. Later it was published as part of the Alcoholics Anonymous resource materials. Over the years, it has been simplified as such:

God grant me the

Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

Courage to change the things I can, and

Wisdom to know the difference.

Today, the "Serenity Prayer" is one of our most familiar and popular prayers. It is simple enough to be easily memorized, yet profound enough to give direction in many aspects of our lives.

1. *When did you first hear the prayer?*
2. *How might this prayer impact the pray-er?*

The prayer begins easily enough with the words "God grant me." But when we call upon God it is an admission that we are not the Ultimate One. It is not in our ability to be able to grant all things. As humans, we can go through much turmoil and wrestling to come to terms with our limitations. We try to be God or live independently from God. That is called sin. It is the story of Adam and Eve in the garden trying to live on their terms, disregarding God and God's desires.

Despite it all, God chose to send Jesus Christ into our lives to show us another path. Jesus came, was crucified, and defeated death. Then, he came physically to the disciples to grant them peace and also the Holy Spirit. It is not clear if after the resurrection the scared disciples knew they needed such gifts. Out of great love, Jesus came to his disciples to guide them through that first week. He blessed them with his presence, peace and Holy Spirit.

3. *What does it mean to you to be able to approach God in prayer?*
4. *What do you want God to grant to you?*
5. *When has God given you the gift of peace?*
6. *How is the Holy Spirit at work in your life?*

Prayer

God, grant me a humble heart which allows me to come into your presence with thanksgiving, ready to receive your grace and wisdom. Amen

Dig Deeper

1 Peter 1:3-9

last word

Pray each day the Serenity Prayer:
God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and
wisdom to know the difference.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

Copyright © 2008 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

May be reproduced for local, non-sale use provided the above copyright notice is included.

www.elca.org/evangelizingchurch/dailydiscipleship

2 Easter (A) Page 2 of 2