

## **“Forgiveness” – Reverend Jen Adams**

### **Easter 2C – April 11, 2010**

It was just a week ago we were celebrating the culmination of Holy Week and Triduum services. We gathered very early last week in the pre-dawn darkness, lit candles, proclaimed ‘The Light of Christ’ and then later in the morning celebrated baptism and surrounded ourselves with even more resurrection sights and sounds and smells. Fire and light flowers and bells, butterflies, water and alleluias. The place was pretty packed twice and in-between services we had a wonderful, celebratory brunch. It’s how we do Easter morning here at Grace and all of that is good and beautiful and it should be big. It’s the Sunday that makes all other Sundays.

BUT this morning we’re reminded that Holy Week and Easter and the days following weren’t at all like that for the disciples. There were no big church services for them, no packed pews, no big music. No lovely liturgies or abundant brunches. This morning we heard that they were huddled together behind locked doors and the last couple of weeks had for them been a mess of tragedy, trials and betrayals. They’d lost a friend whom they were beginning to believe might be the Messiah and despite reports from the women they were still grieving and confused. And the whole experience of trial, death and empty tomb hadn’t exactly brought out the best in any of these guys. Judas has betrayed the group while they were praying in the garden and depending on which book you read, he might even have been dead by this point in the story. Peter, the rock and leader of this group, had denied Christ publically three times, thereby also denying his fellow disciples which couldn’t have come easy to any of them. Thomas was nowhere to be found at the beginning of the passage we just heard, perhaps too busy or too scared or still too angry at it all to be there with them huddled in the house. And from all appearances, there was no one (except for maybe the beloved disciple) who had risen to the challenges of the last couple of weeks. So that first Holy Week and Easter weren’t about bells and brunches and alleluias for these guys. It was about loss, fear, confusion, betrayal and experiencing themselves and the guy across the room at what had to be nearly their absolute worst.

So maybe it’s no wonder the first thing Jesus did after he entered through the locked doors was to offer them peace. “Peace be with you,” was the first thing he said and if there was ever a room full of people who needed it, it was these guys. Then Jesus, showed them his wounds, showed them his hand and his side and maybe because he knew they needed it again, said “Peace be with you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” And maybe then the Spirit filled up that locked up, anxiety-ridden, confused place as resurrection met Pentecost in the gospel of John.

Now what happened next was really important too. Through the Holy Spirit, God gifted the disciples with something to help them make their way in this world. Now given the situation which was already hostile and going to get more so, you’d think God might have armed them with swords or at least armor, or in the interest of non-violence maybe God could have filled their minds with extremely effective arguments to turn hearts and minds of the leaders they were soon to bump up against. Invisibility cloaks would have been nice, they could’ve preached and run with no problem. The ability to turn water into wine would’ve come in handy. Then the

disciples could have offered proof that the stories they had to tell contained some semblance of truth.

But the Spirit came bearing none of those kinds of things. Instead what God gave them in order to be able to move forward and to keep moving forward in faith was the power to forgive. Without that they could've stayed stuck right where they were, one huddled little group of frightened people. Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." So when it came to "arming" these guys for the days to come, the power to forgive was the most important power of all.

And the good news was they could practice on themselves before they took the show on the road. Philip could forgive James, Nathaniel could forgive Bartholomew, Matthew could forgive Philip, and Andrew could forgive Simon and Thaddeus or something like that. They could all forgive Peter who would have to forgive himself too and eventually they'd all have to forgive Judas. Then when Thomas returned, Jesus would take the lead in forgiving him. This wasn't just a power to use out there, it was something they needed to keep close at heart while working with each other and while learning and growing themselves. If they were going to continue as a relatively unified people that had a sense of what it takes to be whole, then they had to be able to forgive each other. And so the Holy Spirit gave them that gift and Jesus reminded them it was more important than anything else God could give.

While in some ways it's easier to forgive those who aren't so close to you, it would be a challenge beyond the doors too. How do you begin to forgive crucifixion? Mistrial? Abuses of power, and selfish, crowd motivating fears? How can you possibly forgive abandonment and persecution, let alone persecution of people who only want to proclaim resurrection and liberation and love? That's the kicker isn't it? It's our challenge to. How do we forgive genocide? Bigotry? The enormous gaps that exist in our world between rich and poor?

What's clear in this gospel is that forgiveness is the most important gift we have to give one another and this world. And part of the work of forgiveness is the work of presenting another kind of reality. One in which fear and abuses of power are essentially stripped of their power and replaced with something new. Forgiveness in many ways levels the playing field – those who offer it are as vulnerable as those who are given it. And it just might be the only way in which we can all move forward together. And so if we are to strengthen, build up anything in ourselves and within our community, it would be this power. So practice here. Forgive each other and yourselves here. Engage in practices and projects that present another way of being. Receive the Holy Spirit and know through its power we can change our lives and we can change the world too.

Amen.