

**Sermon, Father William J. Albinger**

**Sunday April 11, 2010**

Easter 2C 2010

*(Sermon delivered from notes – this is a recreation):*

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In the name of our one, ever creating, ever loving, ever sustaining God:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last Sunday, we opened the Easter service with alleluias and the joyous acclamation that “Christ is Risen! The Lord is risen indeed.” But those of you who were here last Sunday may recall that in our reading of Luke’s Gospel account of the finding of the empty tomb, there were no alleluias that Easter morning among the disciples – only confusion, questions and doubts. Easter didn’t happen all at once in the lives of Jesus’ followers and, usually, it doesn’t happen all at once for us.

[Before I start commenting on our Gospel lesson from John, I’d like to give a brief disclaimer. John often speaks of “the Jews” and often disparagingly. The fact is that Jesus, all of the 12 (including John), and most of the people in the Gospels were Jewish. The Gospel of John was written by a community 60 or so years after the events described. John’s community were Jewish followers of Jesus and their opposition were the Pharisees – the only branch of Judaism that survived the destruction of Jerusalem. It should not be taken as a condemnation. That has caused much evil in the world.]

In today’s Gospel reading from John, we find the disciples on Easter evening gather together in a house and the doors of the house were locked. The good news is that the disciples stayed together. The bonds of community were strong. The bad news is that they were filled with fear and had separated themselves from the outside and had locked themselves in.

John tells us that they were locked in “for fear of the Jews” but I think that had more to do with John’s community 60 or 70 years later. They weren’t that fearful that morning when they went out to the tomb to investigate the women’s report of the empty tomb and the encounter with two radiant men.

What were they afraid of? Who did they wish to avoid encountering?

It’s quite possible that the prospect of Jesus’ resurrection filled them with fear. After all, they were his closest friends and they had all abandoned him in the hour of his greatest need. Peter had denied him three times the evening he was taken. Having done that, they knew that they bore some responsibility for his crucifixion. Not knowing what was going on, they barricaded themselves in.

Have you ever been embarrassed about running into someone for some reason? You go to the supermarket and, lo and behold, who do you see down the far end of the aisle? Have you ever found yourself, spending the next five minutes ducking around the aisles like a thief on the run?

If a little social embarrassment can do that, imagine what guilt and shame can do. It wasn’t just the doors that were locked; it was their hearts that had been bolted shut. Closed up by guilt and shame. They may have been telling themselves that they were locking people out, but in reality they were locking themselves in. People do that. When we want to avoid someone or when we want to avoid something we shut ourselves off. People refuse to go out, sometimes even to church, because they are embarrassed or ashamed, or depressed or feeling bad about themselves. We have caller ID to avoid people for all sorts of reasons. In cyberspace, there are all sorts of ways to avoid people and to associate only with the like-minded.

But the Risen Christ has little regard for locked doors. He appears in the midst of them in the locked house. And the Risen Christ has even less use for locked hearts. His first words are “Peace be with you!” “Shalom”. It is not “hello” but the words that unlock hearts – words of

forgiveness. “I come in peace and I wish only the best for you!” They say nothing. He shows them the wounds on his hands and side. Nothing more need be said. It is all there for all to see. No more elephants in the room.

Then Jesus Christ does an amazing thing, he makes them part of himself and his ministry. He breathed on them and said, “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.” Jesus again calls them to carry on.

What is Jesus doing? These are the same people who just proved themselves unworthy as disciples. What is he doing signing them up again! But Jesus knew what he was doing. Those who knew and accepted their guilt in his violent and unjust death were totally transformed by his unconditional love and forgiveness. They hadn’t expected this. Perpetrators of anger, hate and violence only expect the hate and violence to be returned. But God’s cure for hate and violence is different. The Resurrection shows such anger and violence to be powerless before God’s life-giving power. The only way to stop violence is by not participating in it and returning forgiveness and love.

Having been forgiven, the disciples knew how to forgive. Having been forgiven, how could they refuse forgiveness to others? If they did refuse, the anger and potential for violence would remain within them and the other.

Today we are going to baptize two young people who visit us each year and who asked their parents to be baptized here at Holy Innocents. Thursday we met and went over the service. We studied the prayers and, most importantly, the Baptismal Covenant. Emily and Kevin understand that they are making serious promises and that God’s Spirit will be with them all their lives to help them live out those promises.

You and I were called in baptism to be disciples of Jesus. Why? Because we have special gifts and are better than others? NO. We are called for the same reason Jesus called his original

disciples a second time that Easter evening. Because for some reason Jesus' unconditional love and forgiveness unlocked our hearts and the Spirit was given to us to bring that to others and to the world we live in.

Today Kevin and Emily join us. We are giving them a big challenge – there is a lot of violence and unlocked hearts in the world. But Jesus calls us forward and with God's Spirit to guide and help us, God's power of life will prevail.

Easter didn't happen just once 2,000 years ago. Easter happens every day.

AMEN.