Sermon on John 20:19-31
(Peace Be With You – Part 1)

*As a former Saskatchewan resident; I want to add my and our prayers to those of many Canadians as we try to comprehend the tragedy that has fallen on the young lives connected with the Humboldt Broncos hockey team. (Prayer)*

Often people will ask me, why do we do things the way we do in Anglican worship? What does it mean when we exchange “The Peace” or read the gospel from the middle of the people?

Two larger scale answers: everything we do together is meant to inform our lives outside this building and everything we do together in our service of worship has its basis in what the Early Church did when it gathered.

Most people imagine the Early Church as one thing; but in truth it was many things; there was a lot of diversity in belief and outlook which makes the next thing I’m about to say even more amazing:

For the first millennium of the Church; think about it, for the first 1000 years of corporate worship, while the most severe controversies roiled around the nature of Christ, the nature of God as Trinity; the nature of the Church, the very purposes of God in civilization, there was nary a controversy about Christian Worship: how to celebrate the Eucharist!

In and through it all there was unity about this one amazing reality: whoever and whatever Jesus and the Holy Spirit are; there was no controversy about the “however;” the “how” of Jesus’ presence with us.

It is, the Early church insisted, in and through the divine liturgy of the Holy Eucharist. For the first one thousand years, everyone from the desert Fathers and Mothers to the Emperors, from the slaves to the slave masters believed this.

They would not have known what to do with the idea that Christians could be individualists, finding Jesus “on their own,” Christians who would wake up on a Sunday morning thinking, “naw, brunch sounds better today!”

They would not have known what to do with many of the Churches that formed under the pressure of the Reformation and then, later, more radically, in North America; churches that began to look more like university lecture halls, or to put it in modern parlance, 5 choruses and a talking head.

The Anglican divines (formative Church leaders within Anglicanism) agreed with “the first thousand years.”

Anglicanism affirms that we will not form our unity around complete agreement on doctrine, we will form our unity around the common prayer offered at Eucharist.

Now the question that is begging is “why?” Why did the early church come to such a strong conviction of Jesus’ presence with us in just this sort of way; why has Anglicanism maintained this stance even as it stands halfway between Catholicism and Protestantism on other issues?

Put simply: the 50 day Celebration of Easter and the stories of Jesus’ appearances that mark it!

The Resurrection appearance stories of Jesus shaped Christian worship and just so shaped Christian life in the world. They coined a Latin phrase *lex orandi lex credendi,* the law of praying is the law of trusting or Christian living.

Our story today is a classic example. Writing sixty years after the historical Jesus, John locates both stories on “the first day of the week,” Sunday, the day that has become the day of worship for followers of Jesus, the Day on which Jesus was raised.

On this day, the disciples gather; notice your bulletin: The Gathering of the People. They gather in fear. They gather with a niggling of hope in their bones but it’s not yet hope that overcomes their fears.

Can you relate? Week by week we gather in a “state:” confused, embarrassed, afraid, excited, calm, perplexed; and yet we wouldn’t come if we didn’t also feel a smidgeon of hope.

The important thing is we gather: it’s in our gathering that the foundation is laid for all that follows.

And then, “Jesus came and stood among them!” The room they were in would have looked like any of a million rooms; the building we find ourselves in today might be beautiful but it’s still made with human hands; it’s not spectacular in the way a cathedral is spectacular; it’s not garish in the way “Trump Tower” is garish.

In that sense this space is “ordinary” even as that unnamed locked room was run-of-the-mill

Without this line, “Jesus came and stood among them!” there would be no reason for us to gather; there would be no reason to build places like the one we’re in today.

It is what happens when we come together in whatever state we find ourselves that matters; it’s why we sing, why we pray, why what we do becomes a sacrament

The Resurrected One is here! And sometimes we recognize it and sometimes, like Thomas, we don’t get it, believe it or sense it. But we keep gathering, keep that smidgeon of hope alive in whatever state we are!

“And Jesus came and stood among them *and said*.” You’ll note the next major heading in your bulletin “The Proclamation of the Word.” The Risen Christ doesn’t just show up like an image of the Virgin Mary on the rain splatter on one of our windows.

No, the Risen Christ speaks. We gather in our state; the Risen Christ comes amongst us and the Risen Christ speaks.

We read the scriptures and sometimes one line from them will strike us; will activate that smidgeon of hope embering in our souls.

Sometimes nothing in the homily makes sense but a line from the psalm rings like a bell!

Sometimes what the priest says helps; sometimes it’s meant to get us to look deeper, to ask questions, to disagree and find the truth of things.

Sometimes it all comes together and we leave rejoicing. And when we do it’s because what’s come together for us is some part of, some version of what Jesus says here: “Peace be with you,” and again, “Peace be with you, As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Shalom, wholeness, integration, new vistas opening on the world and on our relationships; the word Jesus uses means all of this and so much more. If we were to summarize the Good News of God in one word it would be this one: Peace!

Whatever you hear that is helpful is the Risen Jesus speaking to you in whatever state you are in! And whatever is helpful will help you trust, help you serve, integrate your desires and ground you in reality!

Whether you know it or not, whether you name it or not; when you come to this place, with these people, that is the Peace you seek!

The Proclamation of the Word and the Mission of the Church come together in this one word: Peace.

That’s why we exchange it: we’re acknowledging its truth and beginning to practice with one another.

Jesus acts and explains further: he leans in at this point; so much so that the disciples feel his breath on their cheeks; some of us may remember that the Lord God breathed into Adam making him a living soul and understand that this is what the Resurrected Jesus does.

Breath and Spirit are the same word in both Hebrew and Greek

Jesus’ gift of the Spirit to those who love and trust him is a recreation of humanity with a refreshed and renewed Mission: To bring wholeness, integration to everyone and everything!

But there’s more; Jesus doesn’t leave us in the abstract; he puts into our hearts and hands the one tool by which the Holy Spirit and us will create a new world: forgiveness.

Under the influence of Jesus, psychology has recognized that the most healing, empowering, freeing action we can ever take in our lives is to forgive those who injure us.

It also happens to be the hardest thing to do. Jesus’ words about sins being forgiven or retained should be read as a description of a process in community not one-off decisions.

As a person who tends to ruminate about wrongs that have been committed against me; I’m learning slowly, through contemplative practice, counselling received and compassion towards myself that I can *learn* to forgive.

This is my mission; this is our mission. The world change that the risen Christ imagines is far more a function of renewed communities learning to forgive each other and those that have hurt them then it is a matter of new technologies and/or knowledge.

And when we take the wafer and wine our hands, our mouths, our bodies touch the broken Jesus, we touch the very materiality of the forgiveness of God!

The materiality of the Eucharist is the Thomas moment of “My Lord and My God!” You are the one who gives the divine being for my sins, so that I can live a forgiven and forgiving life!

Our worship in a story; our story made possible in this worship!