

“Resist and Begin Again...A Blessed New Normal”

“Deep Peace...Don’t Resist...A New Normal?”

1 Peter 1: 3-9, John 20: 19-31

April 18, 2021

A rerun from May 1, 2011 and April 19, 2020

Ahead of Peter reading:

Those to whom this letter was written were suffering greatly for their belief...their faith.

This was a letter of encouragement...to hope as a way of making it through that turbulent time.

And that hope, the way through, is to be in solidarity with others, joining our humanity with others...our suffering, and so, our compassion.

This is not to say...chin up...man/woman up.

It’s to say

Hope is not a focus on what you don’t have or on a future, but is the deepest trust in humanity,

in resisting non-violently all forms of oppression and persecution.

Even today’s!

Imagine the scene.

Afraid for their lives. Locking themselves *in, them* out.

And there He is...and of all things to say...
Peace be with you! Peace? Peace is with us?

We’re locked behind doors trying to stay safe! We’re afraid.
...trying to figure out what to think, what to believe.

Before John:

In John we see hope made real as it is linked to trust...faith,
Even

the locked doors of our hearts and lives...even though the fear (we may know).

And, Holiness, Christ in this story, comes to us...you...to let us know our wounds, his wounds, are real...

and what has happened won’t stop us from deeply living... letting go of our fears, opening our hearts,

won’t stop us from forgiving ourselves, forgiving others...

won’t stop peace (which comes through justice and not through violence). No shame. No blame.

There is a way to begin our lives again...at peace with ourselves and others. Blessed are those who believe.

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What is it we are to believe?

What is it you have to believe in order to believe?

And He breathes on them...as God breathed life into creation. The same breath God breathed into you...

that one breath of which we all are part.

And again he says, Peace.

And shortly thereafter, Thomas comes...in that moment he's just an average Joe, doubting...the experience of the others.

And, right here, we are...average Joes and Josephines, doubting...like Thomas, doubting the experience of others, even doubting our own experience/our own knowing.

So often, seeing is the only way to believing...we have to see it with our own two eyes!

Jesus knows that.

He isn't mad about it, doesn't make it harder for Thomas...or us. He comes!

He doesn't shame Thomas. He just responds to Thomas' need. Jesus doesn't do shame, guilt. Hear that!

Jesus gives him just what he needs to be able to believe...not more, not less belief than needed...

maybe I should say faith...helps him find just the right amount of faith in the right things!

Faith is not a set of ideas, right ways to think,
it's a way of reflecting, discovering, trusting in deeper truth.
So you can start again right where you are!

And like Thomas, it takes us facing our doubt, not running from it, or hiding behind our fear.

Without shame, Thomas asks for what he needs.

Ask for what you need to keep up your faith.

Oh, he has doubts but he has faith too...faith enough to ask his questions of Jesus directly.

*Are you asking your questions of the right person,
people...God? Asking for what you need to keep faith?*

For so many Christians today, there is only way or the highway...

questioning and doubts have become signs of lack of faith...rather than a sign of faith.

As if believing in the Bible literally or church doctrine literally is the only way to faith, no questions allowed.

As if God doesn't want us to think...as if we aren't capable of thinking. As if we should

always doubt...ourselves!

When, like the 12, we put our heads in our hearts...

Doubt and faith come together.

Doubt and faith are not opposites.

The opposite of doubt is...certainty!

Faith and doubt are twinned!

They help each other, deepen understanding.

Thomas' faith is twinned with his doubt.

Faith without doubt is a rote exercise,
a monolith of absolutes...
often designed to keep feelings and life at bay...
and it often works...

at least...until life starts raining on you...

then *that kind* of unquestioning faith often becomes a slippery slide...down!

Nothing for your doubt to hang on to...
no way for your faith to respond.

Genuine faith, as Jesus lives it, relationship with God,
isn't afraid of life or doubts. Life's rain.

It doesn't do shame or blame.

Or hold on to grudges...retain the sins of others
...which imprisons us, not them!

Retaining the sins of others imprisons us, not them.

When we will not forgive...others, forgive ourselves,
we keep ourselves in past misery and we keep ourselves
from being able to start again.

We live in bitterness rather than peace.

When we live in fear, stressed, hanging on to bitterness...that's not living at all!

When we are desperate to eliminate doubt, embracing a false sense of security in a set of
ideas...

we become fearful of anything that questions the status quo...even if that quo ain't so grand!
And we "kill" it.

We become like those so long ago who were so enmeshed in the doctrine, certain they were right, so threatened when their status quo was challenged...

those who sought peace through violence, rather than justice...

we, like them, kill Jesus off...dig-in,

stick to old positions and patterns,

rather than question, rather than trust in something new, rather than embrace a new truth.

Unwilling to even consider starting again...

wondering why we don't have peace in our lives.

But the stories of Easter let us know:

we **can** begin again we choose it.

Christ comes alongside you as life rains down on you.

He's calling your name, and inviting you, you!

...to touch and see...no blame. no shame.

Inviting you to grow into this living hope, this genuineness of faith not because you have no doubts but because you can think anew, believe...in God alive in you.

Doubts and all! Peace.

Often, peace comes at the oddest of times....as unexpected as the risen Christ entering a locked room. Comes right through our doubts, despite our certainties as we open our minds and our hearts.

What is the deep peace you need most...now?

Christ comes to you knowing your doubts, your need to see and so you can believe. Will you see Him there?

Christ breathes on you. You receive the Holy Spirit. You are not alone. Peace is with you.

Feel a deepening within you....breathe in, cherishing yourself ...breathe out, cherishing the world.

Ask Christ, the Spirit of Truth, for exactly what it is you need to "unlock the doors" of your hard hearted belief and let go of your fear in such a way that peace can find its way into your life...your precious life.

We all have had and will have again those Doubting Thomas times.

Will you see them for what they truly are?
The truth beneath the turbulence? Will you start again?

Christ invites us to be at peace...with the Thomas in us.
Invites us to ask the right question and come close...
so close.

Close enough to put hands in His/your/our wounds...
for it is right through our wounds...your wounds...not running from our fear and pain, but
moving toward it...doubts and all...that...
we find the peace God offers.

Peace the fulfillment of hope...beyond hope.

Jesus comes to bring you peace right where you need it most...the holes in your hands, your
side, your heart.

And when any one of us is bereft with doubt,
we hold belief for each other...staying alongside each other.

Willing to show each other our wounds so healing of our souls can begin. So we can change
our mind and start again.

We are Easter People, and Jesus says...
Deep Peace to you. Start again.

It's never too late: we can change our mind!
Start Again!

“Begin again” life whispered in my ear;
for some days are beginning days.
Some days are designed to be the day we try again.
And on those days...the sun rises...for you.
On those days, God is cheering for you.
That's just the way God and beginnings work.
For when your heart is broken and your life is in pieces,
or when the addiction or the depression have found their way
back into your bones,
or when you lose sight of the person that you were called to be...
then...exactly then...that wildness, that loss, that truth beneath the turbulence of your
life...will sing to you:

“Begin again.”

“Begin again” with the person you want to be.

“Begin again” with the person you want to love.

“Begin again” with the knowledge of your faith.

“Begin again.”

The Sun is rising for you.