



SERMONS THAT WORK

Easter 2 (A)

Shalom: Faithful to the Dream of God

[RCL] Acts 2:14a,22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

We call today Doubting Thomas Sunday. The problem is, there is no doubt! No, really. English Bibles since the King James Version have Jesus saying to Thomas, “Do not doubt but believe.” But it’s not there in the Greek text. It does not say “doubt.” The Greek is *pistos*, an adjective meaning “faithful” or “trustworthy.” Richard Swanson, in *Provoking the Gospel of John*, translates this as, “Do not become unfaithful, but faithful.” This is just what Thomas has been up to this moment throughout the Gospel of John: faithful and trustworthy to a “t”!

When word came to Jesus that Lazarus was ill, and Jesus said, “Let’s go to him,” all the disciples but one said, “No, there are people around Jerusalem and Bethany who want to kill you!” Only Thomas, faithful and trustworthy, said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” Thomas is faithful and trustworthy. Jesus knows this. There’s no doubt about it. We need to dispense with anything to do with “Doubting Thomas.” Let there be no doubt about that! For Thomas is alone among this room full of disciples to declare, “My Lord and my God.”

Thomas recognizes Jesus as the God of justice and mercy. Those first reading or hearing John’s story of Jesus would have recognized that the moment Jesus breathed on them, he bestowed upon them the gift of God’s *ruach*, God’s Spirit. They would recognize it as the same Spirit-Breath that brooded over the chaotic waters of Creation in Genesis 1:2. The same Spirit-Breath that God breathes into a handful of dust and water to form the first man in Genesis 2:7. The same Spirit-Breath of which God says to Ezekiel, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.”

As he breathed on them, Jesus said, “Shalom, Peace be with you.” If there is a single word that summarizes the controlling vision of world history in the Bible, it is “Shalom.” Shalom says that all of creation is one, every creature in community with every other, living in harmony, justice, and security, as we move toward joy and well-being for all, for every creature under heaven, and for every living thing - the very earth itself. According to Walter Brueggeman’s interpretation in “Living Toward a Vision,” God’s faithful are to understand themselves as “members of a single tribe, heirs of a single hope, and bearers of a single destiny, namely, the care and management of all God’s creation” (Brueggeman, p. 15).

Thus, “Do not become unfaithful, but faithful,” is Jesus’s invitation to Thomas and all who are present to live into God’s dream of Shalom, and to share in the management of all God’s creation. It is this dream of God’s Shalom that “resists all our tendencies to division, hostility, fear, drivenness and misery” (Brueggeman, p. 16). By saying, “Shalom,” and breathing upon them, Jesus reminds all who would be faithful to him and the God of Shalom of their calling, their responsibility, to the care and management of all of God’s creation: every person, every creature, every plant, every body of water, every molecule of breathable air. We might say with some degree of confidence that this moment among followers of Jesus that evening on the day of Resurrection was in fact the very first Earth Day. It just took until April 22, 1970, for us to institute an annual reminder of this, our central task as humans interdependent on one another, all creatures, and the environment itself. Our lives depend on the lives of the whole environment. This suggests the importance of Earth Day which will be observed later this week.

It would not be until 2008 that Harper One would publish *The Green Bible*, in which all passages concerned with environmental stewardship are printed in green – it’s a Green-Letter Bible! The foreword to *The Green Bible* was written by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who says, in part,

“I would not know how to be a human being, how to think as a human being, how to walk as a human being, how to talk or how to eat as a human being except by learning from other human beings... We’re made for community, we’re made for togetherness, we’re made for friendship... to live in a delicate network of interdependence, for we are made for complementarity. I have gifts you don’t have. And you have gifts I don’t have. Thus, we are made different so that we can know the need of one another. And this is a fundamental law of our being.

“All kinds of things go horribly wrong when we flout this law – when we don’t ensure that God’s children everywhere have a supply of clean water, a safe environment, a decent home, a full stomach. We could do that if we remembered that we are created members of one family, the human family, God’s family.

“We must act now and wake up to our moral obligations. The poor and vulnerable are members of God’s family and are the most severely affected by droughts, high temperatures, the flooding of coastal cities, and more severe and unpredictable weather events resulting from climate change. We, who should have been responsible stewards preserving our vulnerable, fragile planet home, have been wantonly wasteful through our reckless consumerism, devouring irreplaceable natural resources. We need to be accountable to God’s family. Once we start living in a way that is people-friendly to all of God’s family, we will also be environment-friendly.

“As you read *The Green Bible* starting in Genesis, you will see that after God created birds, fish and animals he created humans to... act compassionately and gently toward all forms of life. The future of our fragile, beautiful planet home is in our hands... It is possible to have a new kind of world, a world where there will be more compassion, more gentleness, more caring, more laughter, more joy for all of God’s creation, because that is God’s dream. And God says, ‘Help me, help me, help me realize my dream.’”

When Jesus said, “Shalom. Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you,” when Jesus breathed on them, when Jesus said to Thomas, “Do not become unfaithful, but faithful,” he spoke to *us* - all of us who would be disciples of his. Jesus says to us, “Help me realize my dream - my Father's dream of Shalom for all creation.” This second Sunday of Easter ask us: When will we embrace the dream of God's Shalom? When will we accept the gift of the Holy Spirit? When will we let the love of God be poured into our hearts? When will we, like Thomas, proclaim in all that we say and all that we do, “My Lord and my God!” Let there be justice and mercy for all. There is no doubt that all the children of God, all the creatures of the Earth, and the Earth itself, await our faithful and trustworthy commitment to live in a way that is people-friendly to all of God’s family, and thus, environment-friendly as well. Amen.

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