

Easter 2—Year A
Acts 2:14a, 22-32
Psalm 16
I Peter 1:3-9
John 20:19-31

I woke up this past Monday morning with one question on my mind, “*What now?*” This isn’t unusual—**Holy Week** is one of those weeks that draws us into a laser focus, and when it’s over, I often have that, “*What now?*” feeling. But this year is *different*. This year it came with a *hefty* helping of *uneasiness* and a side of *uncertainty*.

We’ve been at this now for **five weeks**, and it *may not always be pretty*, but we’ve sort of **figured some things out**. We’re **sorting out** how to **work**, how to **do school**, how to **shop for groceries**, how to **do church**, and how to **stay connected**. That **first intense wave of energy** it took to **convert our lives** has *rolled over us*, which *now opens up space* for **other questions** to surface—the “*What now?*” kind of questions.

- *How long will be at this?*
- *What does reopening look like?*
- *How will our leaders balance the very public health concerns with the very real economic concerns?*
- *How do we do this?*
- *What will the new normal be?*
- *When will it be safe?*
- *How will we know when it will be safe?*
- *What does safe look like?*

Trust me, as a “**6**” on the **enneagram**, who is always scanning the horizon for **danger**, I can give you a *thousand permutations of these questions*.

This **virus** has thrown us into our **reptilian brains**, **adrenaline** has been coursing for weeks now. Maybe part of the “*What now?*” is our bodies and hearts and minds and spirits saying, “*I can’t sustain these levels of adrenaline.*” A mental health professional framed this in a really helpful way recently. She said, “*We go to fight, flight, or freeze when presented with a threat. We can’t really fight the virus, we can’t run away from it, so a lot of us are freezing.*” If you hit days where you **feel frozen** in place, where it’s **hard to engage**—*be gentle with yourself*. It’s our **brains not knowing what to do** with a **threat** that’s **hard to fight** and **from which we can’t flee**.

And into this swirl comes this morning’s **gospel** from **John 20**: **When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, and we could just slide in here—the doors of the house were locked for fear of the virus**—Jesus came and stood among them and said, “*Peace be with you.*”

Jesus comes *to us*, comes and stands *among us, right where we are*, behind our locked doors, and wishes us *peace*. That’s the **balm of Gilead**. He shows us his hands and his side; he shows us his wounds; he shows us where the **ventilator tube went in**, where the **iv’s bruised his arms**; he stands before us, very much alive, *and yet*, still bearing the wounds of his ordeal.

He *breathes* on all of us gathered behind locked doors. And, just as the virus is contagious, so is the *Holy Spirit*. Jesus reminds us that even in COVID-19 land, we have *power*; the *power* to *forgive sins* and the *power* to *hold onto them*. We might wish for a bit more of a virus repellant kind of power, *but tending our interior life in times of great fear and anxiety is just as important*.

It's easy for some slight, some frustration, some offhand comment, some unmet expectation to *infect us* right now, when, in normal times, those things would roll off our back, and then that little thing that got under our skin replicates into a full-blown resentment that can lay us low. Jesus reminds us that we have the *power* to *let these things go*, and we have the *power* to *hold onto them* for dear life, *except that holding onto resentment never brings us life; it only robs us of it*. And in this time, when things just take more energy, we really don't want to be giving our energy to things that will deplete it. Jesus has filled us with *his Spirit* and *power*; he has given us the strength we need to *forgive* and *release*.

There is a second part to this story today, and that's the whole Thomas deal. Thomas is the consummate, "*I've-got-to-see-it-to-believe-it guy; show me the hard data; show me the facts.*" Right about now, I'm liking Thomas a lot. He wasn't there on that evening of that first day of the week. He didn't see Jesus, crucified and risen, and he wanted to see this reality and touch it for himself.

It's a week later, and the doors aren't locked anymore, just shut—it's a phased reopening—and Jesus shows up again. Again, he wishes them *peace*.

And then, Jesus turns to Thomas. He doesn't dismiss Thomas' need to *see and touch* the truth of this reality for himself. *Jesus meets Thomas right where he is—"See and touch these wounded places, Thomas; it's me, it's really me; resurrection life is real; life really is to be found, even though the marks of the wounds remain."*

There is no question that the wounds of this pandemic will mark us, *probably for the rest of our lives, and yet, and yet*, Jesus finds us behind our locked doors, behind our shut doors, behind our yearning for certainty, amidst our fear and anxiety; Jesus gets to where we are and wishes us *peace*, *breathes his Holy Spirit* into our weary spirits, gives us *power* to keep on *letting go and releasing* what we must, and dares us to *see and touch* the *resurrection life* that is right before our eyes, *even in all the places that are bearing the marks of the wounds*.

"What now?" I have no idea how that question will ultimately be answered. *But while that answer is getting sorted out*, Jesus is among us, crucified and risen, reminding us that *resurrection life WILL FIND US*, even behind our shut doors. Amen.

The Rev. Cynthia K. R. Banks
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Boone, NC via Zoom
April 19, 2020