

Easter 2C 4-11-10  
Acts 5:27-32  
Rev 1:4-8  
John 20:19-31

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## Forgiveness - The Mark of Easter

CHRIST IS RISEN! Has it only been a week since we said that! Last Sunday was certainly an awesome day. There was music and singing and flowers and shouts and lots of people and a joyous spirit that could not be contained even as we grieved the death of two of our members only the day before. If for some reason you weren't here, I'm sorry you missed it. We celebrated the resurrection of Jesus as the reason that we can live in a world colored with hope. Hope is as essential to the human body as water and in the empty tomb we find a hope that nothing in this world, not even death, can diminish.

That's great. But now what? What do we do when Easter day is done? Sure it is still the Easter season and like to say every Sunday is a "mini-Easter" but there is no getting around the fact that this Sunday will not be like last Sunday. The flowers are fewer and some have wilted. A lot of the crowd has gone away. No trumpets give us goose bumps. The violence, suffering and death of this world continue on with many people living in a world of hurt and darkness. Resurrection from the death seems like an idle tale, like an old story that has no power to change their reality. The colors of Easter still sit in an unopened box. No matter how loud we shout the words, the resurrection just doesn't seem real.

I think that's how Thomas was feeling and each of us can easily identify. We wonder if it is possible to believe in something so incredible as resurrection, especially when it seems there is little to no evidence to back up the claim. And for those of us who do claim to believe, who recite the words of the Creed each week, does it make a difference? Do the colors of Easter really bleed into our everyday lives and change us?

Thomas sometimes gets a bad rap in this story but he is only asking for what everyone else has already received. In John's gospel, there is no faith without some kind of "seeing", without a sign that "marks" Jesus as the one sent from God. The faith of the disciples is a gift that results from the movement of Jesus among them. The marks of Friday

are still visible in his body but all the traces of death are gone, including the desire to get even. The one who has been betrayed, beaten and crucified is not out for revenge or retaliation. Instead the Spirit that comes from his mouth speaks “peace” and “forgiveness”.

But Thomas is the guy who missed the big game everybody else is talking about. Thomas represents the disbelief anyone would have who was told that a man who was beaten and crucified on a Roman cross was now alive! But Jesus doesn't leave Thomas with his doubts. He comes to Thomas in spite of them and Jesus shows Thomas that the marks of death no longer have any power. Thomas then makes the greatest confession of Jesus in John's gospel. That's not “doubting” Thomas. That's “Believing Thomas”.

But if “seeing” – is so important to faith, how can Jesus say, “Blessed are those who have *not* seen and have yet come to believe”? Perhaps it is because **Easter faith is inspired by the mark of forgiveness.** All throughout the gospel of John, Jesus has been trying to move people beyond appearances, beyond the limits and conventions that this world typically operates by. The community of John's gospel is also moving beyond the time of physical encounters with the earthly Jesus. This second generation of believers asks, “How can we believe without seeing the resurrected Lord?”

The words of Jesus give reassurance. Those who have not put their fingers in the mark of the nails “see” Easter through another mark. Empowered by the breath of God who spoke life into being- Jesus sends his followers out into the world just as the Father sent him. There is a line of continuity flowing from the Ultimate reality of God, through Jesus and into us. The community of believers, as the body of Christ, continues to tell the world what God is really like. Think about what that means! Jesus is saying the world “sees” God through... us! I believe that line of continuity from God to us is expressed by a word: **Forgiveness.** (Diagram cross if possible in this) That is how people “see” the resurrected Christ in the world. Forgiveness is the ground of faith grows upon.

That makes **forgiveness the mark of Easter.** For centuries people have looked at John 20:23 and viewed it as a license to justify forgiving some people while excluding

others. But this verse is not about holding some kind of power over someone else. It is about continuing to reveal to the world who God is:

God is Creator - continuing to birth surprising new life.

God is Savior, continuing to release, free, and forgive people from their fears and failures.

God is Spirit, wind and breath - continuing to renew and sustain us even in our doubts.

When, by the power of the Spirit, we forgive and speak forgiveness in this world, we reveal the crucified and risen Lord. On the other hand, when we don't forgive, when we retain the right for revenge, hold onto failure and the hurts caused by others, we become "bound up" - captive to the pain of sin and we can easily cover up the mark of Easter from those who need to see it most.

For many, this kind of radical emphasis on forgiveness seems "soft" "easy" or "wishy-washy". It sounds too much like *anything goes and who cares what you do because forgiveness lets you off the hook*. But forgiveness is anything but easy. Jesus still bears the marks in his hands and side. Forgiveness doesn't mean "no big deal". Actions still have consequences and hurt is very real but forgiveness is the only power that can overcome the wreckage sin leaves in its wake.

It is an unwritten truth in human society that if you hurt me, I have the right to hurt you back. We instinctively practice this from our earliest moments. The trailer for the new movie "Babies" has a scene that shows this perfectly

I once heard forgiveness defined as "*giving up my right to hurt you when you have hurt me.*" There may be voices telling you this is weak but when the God of the universe came to defeat death, there were no armies -or weapons of destruction -or shows of force. Instead, there was simply the words of a man crying out to heaven as nails were driven into his body, "Father forgive them".

I leave you this morning with some possibilities to ponder.

**What if forgiveness really is the mark of Easter** – the way the world sees the risen Christ?

What if we started (right now) living life based on radical and uncompromising forgiveness?

What if instead of getting even we got together?

What if instead of shouting we began listening?

What if instead of demanding satisfaction, we invited conversation?

What if the mark of Easter our children “see” is the forgiveness they witness between their parents?

The promise of God, made certain in the death and resurrection of Jesus, is that when we risk forgiveness, God speaks new life in the face of death. God resurrects dead relationships and surprises us with new possibilities. God frees us from the heavy loads we carry. God shines the colors of Easter into dark and dreary lives and fills us with the bright hope of a new tomorrow.

What if Jesus really meant it when he taught us to pray, “Forgive us our trespasses ...**AS**... we forgive those who trespass against us?” What if we did this as a community - as a nation? What would the world see? Weakness? Or would they see forgiveness as the mark of Easter, as the sign of life ... freedom... and the end of a cycle of violence based on power. What if forgiveness is the reason someone who knows nothing but doubt can finally say, “My Lord and My God”?

Then death would no longer have any power, Then every act of forgiveness becomes a shout from the empty tomb...

**CHRIST IS RISEN! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**