

Life in His Name

What a glorious celebration it was! Last Sunday, many churches greeted large numbers of worshipers. Many churches welcomed people who see the inside of a sanctuary only once or twice a year. In many churches, it was a day to dress in one's best. It was a day of processions. A day of soaring music. A day to pull out all the stops.

But that was then. Seven days have passed. Lots of folks have put on their everyday clothes and gone back to their everyday pursuits. Gone back to business as usual. Traditionally, this second Sunday of Easter has been known as “Low Sunday” because attendance has fallen off a week after that festival day. That day of great celebration.

But today, in John's Gospel, the church is still reading this story that picks up on the evening of the day of resurrection. It's still Easter! And, my sisters and brothers, *you're* still here! You've gathered here again. Just as first-century disciples have gathered again in an upper room. In that place, according to the Fourth Gospel, the first followers of Jesus learn much about

what it means to have life in his name. This life in Jesus' name is what I'd like us to consider during this time together.

John tells us that in the evening, the risen One comes to stand among his disciples. Though the doors are shut, he comes to them. Altered, somehow, in appearance. Yet still intimately familiar. Still the same. In this One is unbroken continuity. This is the One they remember so well. The One who, not long before his death, promised them peace. Saying: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.*

Now, the risen Christ offers that peace. To *all* his followers! Peace that you and I can't receive from this world. It's not the world's peace because it's not a fragile peace secured by weapons. It's not the world's peace because it's more than the absence of conflict. This peace surpasses human comprehension because it's not a human *kind* of peace. It's God's kind of peace. It's a kind of peace grounded in God's good intention for the creation: Shalom. Wholeness. Harmony. Well-being for the human community. A caring community. A community of peacemakers. A community of people who possess serenity. Who've found calm at the center—even in the midst of the world's chaos and stress and turmoil. Even when the world

ridicules and insults and yes, still persecutes those who bear the name of Christ. Peace is enfolded into life in the name of the One who has reassured: *I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice.*

When those first disciples saw the risen Lord, they did indeed rejoice. Hiding in that closed-off upper room, they were filled with an indescribable joy. Surely, joy characterizes life in Christ's name. I think we need to live into our identity as a people of joy. And we live into our identity as a people of joy by taking delight in our relationship with Christ and in our fellowship with one another. In loving together and in laughing together.

Have you heard the story of the Catholic, Baptist, and United Methodist missionaries who went to serve a tribe in a third-world country? All three were captured and taken to the chief. He said to them, "If you do as I tell you, you can serve my people. Go and find ten items of the same kind of fruit and bring them to me." The three missionaries went searching. The Catholic was the first to return. He bought back ten apples. The chief said, "Eat all ten whole and you can serve here." The Catholic choked on the first apple and died. The Baptist was the

second to return. He brought back ten berries. The chief gave him the same instructions. The Baptist began to eat the berries: one, two three, four, five, six, seven, eight. Then he began to laugh uncontrollably and choked to death. When he arrived in heaven the Catholic said to him, “What happened? You were doing so well. Then you started laughing.” The Baptist answered, “I saw the Methodist coming with his arms full of pineapples.”

Surely these fictional missionaries were filled with God’s Spirit.

The gift of the Holy Spirit has been promised to Jesus’ first disciples. Promised by Jesus before his death. In this upstairs room, the moment has arrived. Jesus breathes the Spirit of God, the breath of God, into his followers.

And that holy breath, that Spirit, touches your life and mine today. An indwelling, abiding presence that never abandons or forsakes. An Advocate who intercedes for us. Who enlivens our worship. Who counsels and convicts. Who reminds of all that Christ has said. Who guides us into life in Christ’s name.

This living in his name means that we are a forgiven people. So much has been forgiven you and me. Whenever we

stumble, God continues to forgive. Being forgiven shapes us into people who forgive. Jesus teaches: *If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven.* They're gone for good, because on the cross Jesus has canceled them. The power is not ours, but the power of God in Christ Jesus.

Who pours out the measureless grace of forgiveness. To forgiveness, we respond by forgiving. The relationship is sequential. We who have been forgiven then become capable of forgiving. That's why Jesus has taught us when we pray to ask God's forgiveness *first*, before we mention forgiving those who trespass against us. Because there are no limits to God's forgiveness of you and me, there's also no limit to the number of times we are to forgive others. Living in Christ's name means that we are a people both forgiven and forgiving.

And there's another thing about living in his name. As Christians, we are a people who have been *sent*. Sent out in ministry and in mission. In that upper room Jesus *commissions* his first disciples. And he commissions you and me. *As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*

My sisters and brothers, before the cross, Jesus cautions his followers not to tell anyone who he is or what will happen to

him. But God has raised him from the dead! Jesus is alive! And it's no secret. He sends you to tell everyone, everywhere! He sends you to spread the great good news. He sends you to comfort. To feed and to clothe. To visit and to witness. To invite and to include. He sends you to care. He sends you to let his love be shown and to let his light shine through you. And when Jesus sends you, he makes sure you have exactly what you need: the words that you are to say and the Spirit-power to do what you are sent to do.

For you are people who live in the name of Christ. According to the Revelation to John, Christ is faithful. He's the One we strive to imitate. Your goal and mine is to grow into his likeness. To be faithful as he is faithful. You are a people marked by faith. You—the church—are a believing community!

Maybe that's why—every year on this Sunday after the resurrection—the church reads the story of Jesus' appearance to Thomas and the others. Thomas who isn't there when Jesus first comes and stands among them.

Poor Thomas. Through the centuries, he's been singled out as some kind of second-class disciple. One who struggles with unbelief. But the Gospel tells us that the other disciples do not

believe until they have seen the risen One. Once Thomas has seen, he *too* believes.

And then Thomas makes the greatest confession of faith in the Gospel. The greatest confession in *all* the gospels.

Thomas and his companions see with their eyes and hear with their ears. And Jesus affirms that their eyes and ears are blessed by what they've seen and heard. But Jesus also has a word of benediction today for all of us who have come *after* those first followers. Jesus blesses those of us who have *not* seen and yet have come to faith. This blessing of Jesus is very full of comfort. For it's through faith that you and I are saved.

Those of us born after that first generation of followers—those of us who have *not* seen—come to faith in a number of ways. We come to faith through the tradition of the church. We come to faith through seeking understanding and by God-given reason. Most assuredly, we come to faith by searching sacred Scripture. And, beloved, we come to faith when we encounter the risen Christ. We remember that Jesus comes to his first followers not as individuals, but as gathered community.

And so—as gathered community—you encounter him today at the Table of Grace. At the Table, Christ meets you. At

the Table, Christ offers you his body and his blood. At the Table, Christ gives you new life. Life in his name!

For this was the whole purpose of the Fourth Evangelist in writing this Gospel, so that you who have not seen may believe—believe in the One who was crucified and is risen. Our Lord and our God. Through believing, you have life in his name. And—Easter people—that’s something to keep right on celebrating!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.