

Canon for Christian Formation

- Focus on ministry to children, youth, and families
 - Working with parishes as a resource
 - Connecting parish leaders, providing opportunities for learning/training
 - Working with DYAC to plan and lead youth events
 - Camp Phoenix
- Safe church training
 - Caring for all of God's people
- Coordinating discernment process
 - Listening for God's will, whether or not that leads to ordination

Overall focus on Christian formation through all walks of life. I think it's important here to explain exactly what I mean by Christian formation:

- Often, Christian formation is thought of mostly as teaching about faith...helping people become steeped in Scripture and tradition, become followers of Jesus, become disciples. However, more and more Christian Formation is being seen not just as forming disciples, but also helping disciples become apostles, those who, once they have learned what they believe, share their faith with others.
- Collect of the day sums this up nicely: "Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith"
- But it's a lot easier to print that lovely sentence in a book than it is to figure out HOW to show forth in our lives what we profess by our faith. Figuring out how to live as though we believe the Resurrection is true is a problem followers of Jesus have been struggling with for centuries.

I think it's no accident that today's Gospel lesson is one of the few passages that's read every single year. In putting together a three year cycle of reading through Scripture, the framers of the Revised Common Lectionary must have realized that the themes of this passage are so universal that we need to hear it again and again. They must have known that we can deeply empathize with the disciples as they huddle together, not knowing what to do after hearing the breathless words brought to them by Mary Magdalene: "I have seen the Lord". Unsure of how to proceed if Christ has indeed been raised from the dead but was not there in the flesh to lead them out into the world. Unsure of how to show forth in their lives what they could now profess by their faith. Unsure of how to move from disciples to apostles.

Often Thomas is the focus of this passage...his great profession of faith only after seeing the marks of the nails in Jesus's hands and placing his hand in Jesus's side. Often we think that the way this passage moves us from disciples to apostles is to teach us how to believe without seeing. But this week I've been drawn to focus on a different part, one that first happens before Thomas even enters the story. Scrolling through social media I saw a tweet that has stuck with me as I've mulled over this reading.. It mentioned how important it is that the words that Jesus first speaks to the disciples when he appears in the midst of the locked room are not words of judgement against those who abandoned him, or a call for vengeance against those who killed him. Instead the first thing they hear from him after he is raised from the dead is "Peace be with you"

In the midst of so much uncertainty, anxiety, and fear: “Peace be with you” - which is quickly followed by words of commission: “as the Father has sent me, so I send you”, breathed upon the disciples along with the gift of the Holy Spirit, to guide and strengthen them on the way.

Centuries after the Resurrection our world, just like that of the disciples, is full of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear. Sometimes overwhelmingly so. It is daunting to think about how to live as Resurrection people in the midst of it all. How can we step out of our doors bearing words of the love we have received when they so often seem to be swallowed up by words of hate? When stories of bigotry and violence dominate the news cycle, and every day seems to bring a new tragedy to light? How do we show forth in our lives what we profess by our faith: God triumphs over sin and death?

As I’ve thought about this Gospel passage throughout the week, I’ve finally realized the uttering of those few words from Jesus is one of the most powerful moments in Scripture. For me this moment of peace and commissioning is why this passage, read again and again the second Sunday of Easter, is so formational, so important for all who strive to be both disciples and apostles...believers in and bearers of Resurrection joy. Because this passage tells us that we are not in this alone. God’s love, Christ’s peace, and the Holy Spirit’s power have been given to us, to guide, strengthen, and shield us in the midst of a world desperate for Good News. But this passage also tells us that we don’t have the luxury of locking ourselves away and pretending there’s nothing we can do for that desperate world.

When Jesus comes to see the disciples a second time, with Thomas waiting for his moment of proof, it's a reminder that they have work to do. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." There is a world full of people who will not get the opportunity to see Jesus in the flesh, his Resurrection glory shining around them. Instead they will see Jesus in the work and witness of the disciples turned apostles. If they do not remember this moment with Christ, the Good News stops with them. If we do not remember, it stops with us.

And so I'm grateful for this very familiar story that we hear each and every year, and for the new way I have been formed by it this year. I'm grateful to hear again Jesus's words of peace, which ring out across the centuries and soothe our souls as we seek to follow him. And I'm grateful for the reminder that the Good News is too important to keep to ourselves, the joy of the Resurrection is too important to keep locked away, the power of God in Christ is too important to profess by our faith without showing it forth in our lives.