

Second Sunday of Easter

I received a number of Easter eggs on Easter Sunday to help me to celebrate the discovery of the empty tomb. But on Easter Monday I received another gift. I was bird watching at Browns Road Reserve between Callington and Monarto. I sheltered behind a tree to watch birds coming for a drink and a bath in a pool created by the overnight rain. I thought of one of our deceased parishioners who told me that a good birdwatcher waits for the birds to come to them. So I said a little prayer to him and I asked him if he could send me a bird that I had never seen or photographed. The next bird to come along was a Willy Wagtail, a bird that I had seen countless time. But the next bird that came to the water to drink was a Bluebonnet; a bird that I had never seen. If you were in my shoes, what would you make of that?

Easter is a time when we remember our connectedness with one another as people who share a faith in the Risen Lord. I believe that that connectedness goes beyond the grave. Our Easter Gospel stories tell of how the first disciples became people of faith. We hear those stories as being written for us so that we too can come to a deeper faith in the Risen Lord. Today John tells the story of what happened on the night of the Resurrection and then what happened one week later when Jesus came back to allow Thomas to believe in him risen from the dead. But the story is not just about Thomas.

On Easter Sunday evening Jesus greets his disciples with the greeting, “Peace be with you” It is a greeting for us too. He is gifting us with that peace that he promised to give his disciples at the last supper, a peace that the world cannot give, a peace that comes from being in union with the one who has conquered fear and death and the forces of evil. As we make our hearts open to that peace we can pray that those who are caught up in conflict throughout the world may experience that peace.

When Jesus shows the wounds in his hands and his side, He is not just confirming that he is the same person who died on the cross, but those wounds are the constant reminders of the unconditional love that Jesus has for each one of us. He allowed himself to be nailed on the cross in love for us. The last of his life blood flowed from his pierced side so that we could live with him forever.

We are invited to hear what Jesus says next as also being directed to us. “As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.” And for us to do that he breathes his own Spirit of love upon us. The same expression is used in the Book of Genesis for God breathing life into the first human beings in the Garden of Eden. It is with that Spirit of life that we can act as reconcilers for God. “Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are

forgiven. For those whose sins you retain they are retained.” Forgiveness is God’s work, and we can only offer forgiveness to others with God’s love working within us.

John has us in mind when he tells us what happened one week later. When Thomas returns to join the other disciples, he cannot believe that they have seen the Lord on their word alone. He needs to see Jesus and touch his wounds. On the following Sunday Jesus comes again to allow Thomas to see and touch him. In love he offers his hands and his side to him. “Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.” Jesus understands how hard it is for Thomas, and for any of us to become believers.. He wants Thomas to experience the deep joy of knowing that Jesus is alive and with him. Jesus has that same longing for us to believe. Thomas is so moved by Jesus’ love for him that he proclaims, “My Lord and My God.” The beginning and the end of John’s gospel are bracketed by the clearest affirmation of the divinity of Jesus. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God.” was how John began his gospel. Now Thomas can proclaim, “My Lord and My God.” The whole purpose of John’s gospel is to show that Jesus is God. John concluded the body of his gospel by saying, “There are many other signs that Jesus worked and the disciples saw, but they are not recorded in this book.

These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing this you may have life.”

One little detail that we might notice about today’s gospel is that John does not talk about Jesus departing from the disciples. When he comes to empower his Church and send them out, he remains with his Church in the person of that Spirit that he breathed upon them. This is the truth that we try to live: All throughout our life we keep discovering signs of the Spirit of God working in us and in others. We often need the stillness of a birdwatcher to notice where God is at work.

The story of the Resurrection of Jesus is a story that is ever new. Because it is the story of people like you and me making room for the Spirit of Jesus to be at work in our lives. It is the story of how we are connected with the Risen Lord, and through Him connected with others who share our faith. May that connectedness with Jesus and one another continue to surprise us and give us joy.