

Sermon 3B

April 18, 2021

Siblings in Christ, Peace be with you, from the one who promises that new life is possible; Jesus Christ. Amen.

When I was back in NY last fall, I rented a car. As soon as I drove it off the lot, I was reminded of how different driving is there than here. I couldn't even get off the ramp onto the highway because of an accident ahead. Other cars in front of me were backing up on the freeway to drive over a median to get to another exit. Welcome back to New York! A week or so later I was leaving for the airport. It was rush hour on the Long Island Expressway. Things were moving along but construction made it congested in one spot close to the airport. I was in my lane minding my own business when in a split second I heard a "thunk". I wasn't even sure what had happened at first. But then I heard the hum of speeding cars weaving in and out of traffic. When I looked to my left, I saw that the driver side mirror had been swiped by one of the cars that invaded my space. Unbelievable! There was nothing I could do in the moment. I was totally blindsided. Thankfully it wasn't worse. So much for staying in my lane!

You are probably wondering what this has to do with the readings on this second Sunday of Easter. That would be a valid question. So, I'll tell you where I was led by the Spirit through the Scripture readings this week.

In Acts, that speech of Peter's struck me. Especially when he points out to the crowd how confusing it can be to know who really has the power – us or God. I was remembering that our preacher last week Dr. Shauna Hannan said that the opposite of faith is control. Control is ultimately about power.

I do wish those who developed the lectionary had included more of the text. I had to read what came before this in Acts chapter 3 to know what Peter was referring to. At this point in the reading the disciples are post resurrection and post Pentecost. You remember that significant event when the Holy Spirit blew through the house like a freight train and lit the disciples on fire, both spiritually and visibly. If you don't remember, we will hear that story on May 23rd this year. But Peter was on fire with the Holy Spirit, eager to share what he had come to understand about Jesus. And the amazing ministry they were able to do in Jesus' name. In this speech he is speaking to them about a recent healing of a man who was born unable to walk. Peter commanded the man to stand up and walk in the name of Jesus, and as we have come to expect from biblical stories, the man was able to walk. But Peter doesn't want people who witnessed the miracle to be confused about who actually made it possible.

I was thinking about Peter, though. Standing up and pointing fingers at the crowd, as if they were the only ones confused. Every preacher knows that when we speak, we are usually preaching to ourselves. Peter, who only a little while before had denied he had anything to do with Jesus as he was led away to death. Who ran away and hid from fear while Jesus was left on the cross. Who tried to control his own situation by avoiding any association with God when things got scary and difficult.

But now...Peter seems so clear-headed and confident about his purpose and place. Even though over the previous year of spending time with Jesus, he had veered more than a few times. Like that time he tried to take control and rebuked Jesus for telling the truth about what had to happen. "Get behind me, Satan!" Jesus reminded Peter of his place in all this. "Stay in your lane, Peter!"

Now Peter was doing the reminding for the crowd. And maybe reinforcing it for himself. God is the one who glorified Jesus and we are the ones who rejected him. Stay in your lane.

The author of 1 John reminds us too of our place in all this. "Beloved, we are God's children now." One of the things that children think they want most is the power to control their own lives. But when we become adults we often yearn to return to that time when we were not responsible for so many things. Even for the lives of those who depend on us, like our own children.

But often it is our fear about the future that makes controlling the present so much a part of our daily struggles. We think...If we can only make ourselves secure and be prepared... but those who have ever had the rug pulled out from under us by life's unexpected circumstances, know the falsity of this premise. "What we will be has not yet been revealed." The pastor who wrote this letter reminds us to stay in our lane – abide in God, who takes away the power of sin to control our lives. Live into the role of God's children now. Let God be the one to care for and be responsible for you.

In the season of Easter, we remember how Jesus appeared to his disciples after his death. Not as an apparition but in actual bodily form, wounds and all. But even with Jesus right in front of them, the disciples can't process what the resurrection means for them. What stood out to me was how the author of Luke describes their state of being when they saw Jesus. It is more emotion than we get in most of the bible. To help us understand what they were experiencing in the presence of the risen Christ: "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering..."

That seems right to me. It's the lane I occupy on many days – disbelief and wondering. Often wondering about how God's power and our need for control work together. Wondering where God is when things are going sideways. Wondering about how to move forward when we feel stuck and weighed down by our cares.

But even in this state of relative uncertainty Jesus gives us a purpose and direction. Clarifying his lane and ours. He, through his death and resurrection offers the

opportunity for repentance and forgiveness of sins to all people. And we are witnesses of this truth.

Joy, disbelief and wonder are all a part of our experience of faith as followers of Christ. And we are in good company with Peter and all those who came before us in faith. Life has a way of sideswiping us when we are going along minding our own business. And our reaction can be to dig in deeper and work harder to manage and control the outcomes. But what if we could understand what God does and how to respond in faith?

God's lane is forgiving us for all the ways we fall short...ours is repentance; turning back toward God when we are lost and unsure of the way forward.

God's lane is granting peace...ours is in accepting that we don't need to control everything. But can let go and live into the promise that in this very moment we are God's children.

God's lane is resurrection...ours is trusting that new life is possible, even when all seems lost.

God's lane is redemptive love...ours is in sharing it so others can experience it through us.