

Easter 2A 23rd April 2017

John 20:19-31

Listen to this, from Deep calls to Deep,

*'The way we do the church year it can be an efficient two-day transition from grief to joy. Jesus is resurrected. Everything is happy and sorted. This is all very well except that it wasn't at all how it was. It wasn't invariably happy and things weren't sorted. Things weren't the same as they had been before Jesus died. It wasn't a return to the old pre-crucifixion world. It was being dragged into a strange new one.'*¹

Resurrection takes a while to work in us, as it did in the disciples, but work it will and it does!

Breathe.

'Belief in the resurrection looks toward God at the very point where humanly speaking there is nothing to hope for and nothing to be done', says theologian, Jurgen Moltmann.²

'In St John's gospel, the Resurrection and the sending of the Spirit are seen as a single event. On the evening of Easter Day, Jesus came and stood among the disciples while they were huddled fearfully in a locked room. His first word to them was shalom. The rich Hebrew word for peace invoked the blessing of the harmony of all orders of being. Shalom flows directly from the Divine harmony which is the Spirit. To receive it is to share in that peace beyond all understanding. Jesus then breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.'

*His breath, which carried his words into their minds and listening hearts, is a medium of the Spirit. Then he gave them the power to forgive sins. This power to forgive. . .is a charism of the Spirit because forgiveness removes the greatest of all obstacles to communication. It heals wounds, confesses the truth that sets us free, consoles pain, calms anger, dissolves resentment, achieves the reconciliation of enemies. Whoever knows the truth has the power to forgive. . .'*³

¹ Deep Calls to Deep App - <https://www.abmission.org/pages/apps.html>

² Jurgen Moltmann *God in Creation* cited in *Deep calls to Deep*

³ An excerpt from Laurence Freeman OSB, "Spirit," *JESUS THE TEACHER WITHIN* (New York: Continuum, 2000), pp. 187.

The Easter disciples were grieving, fearful, uncomprehending – but something from their experience of Jesus' life leads them to trust – something in Jesus' words and breath changes them ...

Thomas turns around – from vehement denial, questions and skepticism – to faith, trust, and an astonishing statement which is the climax of John's gospel:

'My Lord and my God!'

Notice that is okay to have questions and its okay not to have all the answers.

Thomas was not with his friends when Jesus appeared to them the first time after his death, yet, a week later, Thomas was with them (v.26). The church, the disciples, didn't throw Thomas out because of his questions, his doubts.

It seems important to provide enough space for the doubter. There are times when we as a community hold others, and times when we need to allow others to hold us.

So if we learn of God from present experience (as well as from Scripture and tradition) then it is important to listen, watch, notice, to hear the stories of those we meet, to search for hints of God in the cracks and to stay with people on their journey no matter where it takes them. We need to find out what questions people are asking, to get our hands dirty, to stay with each other, hang in there – because that is where we'll find God today.

It was theologian Paul Tillich, in his small book, called *Dynamics of Faith*, who claimed that authentic faith included doubt as well as affirmation – and that questions were not a sign of faithlessness, but a willingness to take faith seriously.

And so we come back to Thomas with his questions and doubts. Thomas met the risen wounded Christ – he recognised Christ in the wounds, and through him, the surprising, untameable God of adventure, who touches us where we are, in the middle of our struggles and at the limits of reason. I believe and trust that this same God keeps reaching out to us in so many different ways.

(Perhaps you are curious, or committed or questioning. Let me tell you a story of symbol and trust ... of grief and hope ...a resurrection

story.. I'm afraid it is another story of symbol.. you've heard of pomegranates, and sunflowers, now, appropriately, at Easter, butterflies!

Butterflies have been an important symbol for me for a long time. After a retreat in Canberra many years ago I bought myself a butterfly ring and necklace from a Gallery as a symbol of new life, of finally leaving home.

A short time later I chose the butterfly, a symbol of resurrection, for my white ordination stole. It is a beautiful blue Ulysses butterfly – the wanderer, or pilgrim – a symbol with layers of meaning, including, resurrection!

The life cycle of the butterfly as many know, is a metaphor for the story of Easter. The caterpillar seems to die, dissolve, then eventually re-emerge from the chrysalis, with wrinkled wet wings which dry in the sun and a beautiful butterfly is born – a miracle of new life, colour, beauty, which touches the earth lightly.

At midnight on Christmas Eve in the year 2000, I was preaching in the dark quiet to a packed congregation at St James Church, King Street in the centre of Sydney.

I was in the middle of my sermon when a huge butterfly flew above our heads. I was mesmerized, and so was the congregation. I stopped my sermon and watched, then said, 'I thought butterflies were an Easter symbol, not Christmas!' then went on with my sermon.

Little did I know that my future husband, Nikolai, who was sitting near the front of the church with his daughter Kate, had different thoughts.

Exactly 12 months earlier, he had buried his beloved wife, Ellie. Shortly before her death he had bought her a beautiful white nightgown, not realising till after her death that it was decorated with the outline of butterflies.

On the day of Ellie's death, at Calvary Hospice in Sydney, Nikolai went outside onto the balcony trying to make sense of it all. A butterfly flew around Nikolai seeming to dance, then landed right next to his hand, on the balustrade, its wings pulsing. Then it did a figure of eight dance as it left, and a sailing boat that had been in Botany Bay all week slowly moved out to sea. Nikolai understood; Ellie was okay, she was saying goodbye.

Twelve months to the day, after her funeral, when he saw the butterfly at St James, again he was reassured, and felt he was home and need look no further – he had found a new partner and Ellie would give her blessing ...

So, on 6 January, two weeks later, the Feast of the Epiphany, Nikolai called me and asked me out ... I said I had been looking for my butterfly sermon, and he said, "I must tell you my butterfly story sometime."

and the poignant resurrection/new life symbol continues ... My life and Nikolai's began again.)

Breathe in the seeds of new life. Breathe in God's Spirit.
Christ is Risen
He is risen indeed.

Practise Resurrection.
Breathe.
Trust, lean into God. Let go.
Breathe

What are the butterflies in your life?
Who or what shows you the risen Christ?

Where are the seeds of hope in your own life?
Where are the seeds of hope in our church?⁴
Practise saying, with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"
Turn to God, and wait.
Susanna

⁴ Deep Calls to Deep