

**Deacon Colleen Spaeth**

When Fr.Pat & I sat down to set the date for my last Sunday, I think we especially picked 'low Sunday', the Sunday after Easter. Traditionally nobody shows up on the Sunday after Easter. Low numbers in attendance, low bow out of the deacon, not too much fuss, the way I wanted it. I am not good at goodbyes, don't like them at all.

But then the past few weeks people have been emailing me, talking to me after church, letting me know that they were going to especially be in the pew because they didn't want to miss my last homily. Talk about pressure, people expecting my last homily to be impressive, memorable, some said they would have tissues at the ready. Talk about pressure!

Now preaching is not something I take lightly. I pray and cogitate a long time, asking God to give me signs, to point me in the right direction, what is it He would like the folk in the pew to hear from my lips, not really my words, but his words, his message, words meant for others. I get real nervous if I don't feel that I am "plugged in" let's say, on the same page maybe, maybe I'm not meant to really preach after all.

So right after Easter Sunday I begin to meditate and pray, something like, "hey God, it's getting down to the wire here, give me some clues, some help here". I took a look at the scriptures assigned for today again, and as I went to bed Monday night, still with blank paper next to my bed, I started to get nervous. Okay, God – need some help here!!

About 4:40 Tuesday morning I woke up, unable to sleep. It was a beautiful almost summer morning time, and I went out on the back porch and just sat and enjoyed the summertime fresh air, and started to make notes, feeling I was finally beginning to clear my head. Before I knew it time to get dressed for work.

Now you must understand since I have gained so much weight I now have three pairs of work slacks. So I dress quickly for work, slipping into my Tuesday pants, a blouse and light sweater, and head off to work. On the way to work I notice a pretty seam on the side of my pants, and celebrate that I must have found another pair of pants in my closet, how cool is that, I have four pairs!

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Tuesday morning is a beautiful day, and on the way into the building I stop to say hello to my friends Officer Harris and Jo, the security guards at PSE&C in my building, stop to say hello to Wayne & Jamal at the front desk, stop to speak to a few lawyers in the hallway before heading to the court reporter's room, and then into my courtroom.

Imagine my medicated horror when I discover while in the middle of the morning in court when I look down and notice that I have my pants on inside out!

What a community of loving friends I have! Looking back I can remember a few quizzical eyes on me, as I meandered thru the halls with my walker, now I know why. None of those who noticed this lady walking to work with her pants on inside out could tell her! That's my community – that's why I love going to work – they love me!

Switch now to a very, very different community...

In the Gospel reading today we hear of the community of which Thomas is a part. The fellows that Thomas associate with can't wait to tell him what has happened the first time he missed a gathering. Jesus visited! Not only that, but Jesus visited and had much to say – but Thomas doesn't want to hear it. Forget that Jesus had a message of Peace, forget that Jesus shared the message of the Holy Spirit, forget about warning of forgiving or retaining sins.

Nope – to Thomas it's all about Thomas! Unless I put my hand here and there, I will not believe. Thomas does not want to be embraced by his community, he doesn't want to hear about their renewed faith in Jesus, it's all about Thomas.

So now it's the third week and they're all gathered again, the scripture tells us of Thomas' wish, or his expectation, whatever you want to label it, and Jesus came and stood among them again.

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The message is the same, Peace be with you! Then a little more, A little more for us all this time later – blessed are those who have not seen yet still come to believe.

I wonder, could it be that you and I are part of a community that is blessed? Could it be that you and I, that Grace Church in Haddonfield, New Jersey are part of a greater community that have not seen and yet still strive to believe. What are we, after all, if we are not our faith? And unless somebody here this morning can stand up and say they have seen Jesus and put their hand in his side as Thomas did, whose faith isn't blind?

Jesus told that first community -- it's up to you now guys, I've done my part, I've taught you all I know, I have shared it all with you, now it's your turn. He didn't say Hey Peter, it's up to you, he didn't say Now Thomas, now that you've seen me, go out and spread the word. No, right from the start Jesus picked a few good men and women together, a community, and taught them how to see through his eyes, let them pick his brain, let them hang out with him, "did many other signs", as the Gospel of John puts it.

And so it is that today we meet here in this wonderful old building as so many other communities before us have, and this morning as the Baptists and Presbyterians across the street are doing, the Methodists up the street, the Lutherans and Roman Catholics a few blocks away, Mt. Pisgah, Mt. Olivet, the Bible Church, a few others just in this square few miles are all having their community gathering around this very time, and listening to scripture receiving the Holy Spirit, hopefully, extending the peace to one another, and then leaving and extending that same peace, that same Spirit to those we meet outside these doors.

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The Collect says it: that we may show forth in our lives what we profess by our faith. What do we show forth when we leave here, what faith do we profess? Is it a faith of patience with each other, is it a faith of hope for one another, is a faith of trust, or perseverance? When we look at the guy standing next to us in the pew, or the line at the Acme, or in the bank, or at the red light, do we look through eyes of faith, eyes that have not seen but still believe?

Do we seek to serve God, or ourselves? Are we anxious to let the person we work with know what they've done wrong, that their pants are on inside out, or are we willing to embrace them and see them through the eyes of God? Can we look past the sins of others, sins that we can only possibly recognize because we saw them in the mirror this morning, and forgive, and in effect forgiving ourselves?

If you forgive the sins they are forgiven; if you retain the sins, they are retained.

It's really so simple , and yet, sometime we all play miniature Gods and of course in passing judgment on another we have trapped our own spirits. Jesus says in the Gospel today, "Peace be with you". It's not a message just for us, it's not a secret!! It's an instruction!! It's a reminder! It's more than food for thought!

"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, so I send you". That means you, and you, and you and me – just as we are, only as we are, all that we are. And it's all good.

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We have many choices as people of faith. We can come to church, listen a little bit, put in our envelopes, have some coffee, talk to our friends, and go home and feel good that we just showed up. And that's all a good thing.

We can come to church, listen a little bit, put in our envelopes, have some coffee, talk to our friends, and go home and think about how we can be a little better at sharing our faith today than we were yesterday, that's a good thing.

There are many, many different scenarios of choices – after all God gave us free will and we can be the architects of our own lives. But he also left us with lots of guidance, ways to read the signs along the road. He also gave us each other to practice on. We are a people of faith, and as such we are supposed to behave like it! What kind of world would this be if we really did seek and serve Christ in others! What kind of community would we be if we really were our brother's keeper? What if we really did pray and responded to the answers that came to us in our prayers?

We're supposed to participate in our life! We're supposed to act as if we believe, aren't we?! If not, why dress up, why put on clean underwear and come every Sunday?

It is so very hard as your deacon to look out at you today, and say so long. I am going to miss you all. I am so filled with gratitude for having this opportunity to serve as your deacon. You are a wonderful people.

It is the role of the deacon to bring the world to the church and the church to the world. I hope I have been faithful to that role, I hope I have done right by you.

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If I am able to say just one thing, to leave you with one message, it would be PEACE BE WITH YOU, and to encourage you to continue to dance, to jump onto the dance floor of life, to be among the folk that do not doubt, but believe. That you are among the blessed that have not seen but still believe. I leave you with the words of one of my favorite songs: