

If the surveys told us anything, it is how precious our children are to our family of faith. I am sure that has been true since the doors to the church first opened. It was with grieving hearts that we lit the Memorial Candle for one of those children today. Scott Plummer attended our Sunday School and was a member of the Youth Group. As I asked when lighting the candle this morning, share your memories of Scott with each other and his family. Hold his mother, Donna; sister, Marcy; and brothers, Chuck, Shawn, Chris and Toby; and his children, Erin and Tyler and Grace in your hearts and prayers. The beautiful flowers on the altar this morning were placed there in Scott's memory.

We are grateful to Marianne Louderback for the lovely music this morning. And we pray for Carolyn's and Viola's continued healing. This week marked Jane and Roger Sandler's 22nd anniversary and Jack Hood's birthday. And in the coming week, wish Ricki Waltz a happy birthday. It was a joy to have Earl Wright back with us today.

Tuesday I will leave for the University of the South in Tennessee. It was through this institution that I completed four years of Education for Ministry. I look forward to being on the campus for a conference, *Becoming Conscious: Rebirth of Soul Through the Wisdom of the Enneagram*. "God's voice of love is more readily heard when our consciousness is available. The Enneagram guides individuals and organizations to hear the voice of God more clearly. It embodies the best of ancient wisdom along with the truths taught by Christ." It is my belief that this will nurture my soul and it is my hope that it will lead to truer pastoring for you. I will be in Tennessee and Alabama for the week, but I will have my cell phone ([207-837-1620](tel:207-837-1620)) and email [jackbethhood@comcast.net](mailto:jackbethhood@comcast.net) Feel free to contact me on either one.

Reverend Dr. Edward Wynne will be leading worship next Sunday.

The Congregational Church of Bristol has invited us to join the Pemaquid Peninsula CROP Hunger Walk to be held June 5 at 1PM. If you would like to be Union Church's CROP Walk Recruiter, please let Lori know.

Grubby Sunday is scheduled for Sunday April 24 with a rain date of May 1st.

**NEW TESTAMENT** Acts 5:27-32  
**GOSPEL READING** John 20:19-31

**MESSAGE** *Now what?* Pastor Beth Hood

Imagine yourself alive two thousand years ago. What would you be doing? What would you be talking about?

Are you one of the skeptics discussing the latest conspiracy theories about who took the body of Jesus. And what did they do with him?

Or are you one of the scores of people who have followed him through Galilee, feeling his love, seeing the miracles?

In the monologue last week, we heard Johana say that she knew she could not go back to the court of Herod. There was nothing left for her there. I imagine most of the followers found it difficult to 'go home' again.

Or even closer, what if you were one of the disciples?

Several went back to their homes around Capernaum to resume fishing.

Two walked home to Emmaus telling the story of all that had happened to a stranger who joined them on the road.

What of Jesus himself? This was the ultimate second chance.

Would you have walked back into Jerusalem? Into the halls of power? With a triumphant, "I told you so!" or "I'm ba-a-a-ack!"

Our markets today are saturated with books and movies about people who have 'returned from the dead', some of them quite moving. Some very convincing.

Jesus, was Jewish, a people rapt with devotion to written words. He was literate, we know that from stories of him reading or quoting from the Torah in synagogue. Why not write a book?

I know even now, when something earth shattering happens I want to go home. I want my Mom or my Dad or Jack. I want to be among the familiar, I want to sink my hands into the dirt-either taking my anger out on weeds, or in hope planting new blooms.

And evidently, that is how Jesus felt too. Mary found him in the garden. Later he walked to Emmaus listening as people began to tell his story. The next morning he made breakfast for the men who'd gone fishing all night in Capernaum.

But before that, he went back he went back to the familiar, the people he had shared the last three years with. And he found them, huddled together in fear and confusion, not knowing where to turn or what to do next.

The disciples were left with an overwhelming sense of failure and loss and shame, aware that they had deserted Jesus in his hour of need. For them, all their hopes, their vision, their sense of direction and purpose in life had gone into that tomb with Jesus.

But suddenly, astonishingly, quietly, there he was right there, in their midst.

It's frightening enough to see someone who was dead suddenly alive, but what if he has every reason to say, "Where were you when I needed you?"

There were no recriminations, no anger, no judgment, no disappointment. The first words Jesus offered were, "Peace be with you."

And then the very next thing he did was to give them the Holy Spirit-he didn't just give it to them, but breathed it into them. In the Gospel of John, this is Pentecost, but the Spirit comes not with wind and flame but with Jesus' own breath, the life force of one raised from the dead who tells them to go out and be peace and forgiveness and love for the world.

It reminds us of creation, when God breathed life into us humans, a tender, intimate, personal moment. And now Jesus breathes new life into his band of frightened, disheartened disciples, giving them the gift of new life, the gift of grace, and commissioning them to share that gift, that good news with the world. And these weak and overwhelmed disciples, now Spirit-gifted are Jesus' own gift to the world.

We too are overwhelmed- with threats of terrorism, global warming, economic problems, wars that never end, an election season that gives us all pause, and of course, with our own private griefs and burdens-health problems, kid problems, too much work, too much worry. What's an overwhelmed person of faith to do?

We disciples of Christ receive that same gift of grace and forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. Jesus sends us out into the world, to put our hands, as Thomas did, on the marks of suffering, to bring good news and hope to all of God's children.

Isn't that why we come to church, and what we hope to experience as part of a community of faith? Isn't that the mission of the church, to love the world? Parker Palmer says, we are "not here to enlarge our membership, nor to bring outsiders in to accept our terms, but simply to love the world in every possible way-to love the world as God does."

On any post-Easter morning, whatever walls we have put up or doors we have locked securely, God comes to us and says, "Peace be with you." Whatever hunger and need we feel deep in our souls, God calls us to the table, feeds us well, and send us out into the world to be justice and peace, salt and light, hope for the world. As God sent Jesus, God sends us today.

Peace be with you!