

Sermon Preached by The Rev. Anna V. Ostenso Moore
St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church, St. Paul, MN
April 28, 2019
Second Sunday of Easter, Year C
John 20.19-31

Good morning. I am Anna Ostenso Moore – wife, a priest, and part of a large predominantly Mid-western family. I'm the Associate for Family Ministry at St. Mark's Cathedral. I bring greetings to you all from Dean Paul Lebens-Englund and the people of St. Mark's. One of my joys in my role there is the ability to worship with my Christian sisters and brothers in other faith communities some Sunday mornings. I am grateful to be with you all this second Sunday of Easter.

When I said a large Mid-western family in my introduction, what I meant is that I grew up knowing all four of my grandparents, my thirty-six aunts and uncles, my forty cousins, and many great-aunts and second cousins.

One of the important family members in my childhood was my Grandpa Ostenso, or Grandpa O. He was the grandpa with whom I'd pick apples and discover baby rabbits, the grandpa who was the only doctor I enjoyed visiting, the grandpa who traveled with suitcases large enough to hold my sister and me. He would also be the first important adult in my life to die.

When I was in sixth grade my Grandpa O. was diagnosed with cancer. His wish was to die at home in Eau Claire surrounded by his ten children and many grandchildren. And he wanted to know that my Grandma O. would be loved and

cared for after his death. His children divided up the tasks. Some, who were caregivers, took on his daily care and medical appointments. Some took on house projects that Grandma and Grandpa had always wanted to finish but never got to. My dad took on their finances. Everyone gathered when they could.

The summer before his death, I remember spending most of it at his home. That summer was also the first time I understood that I had a unique call in my family and in the world.

I cared for my baby cousins, so that their parents could care for Grandpa O. I re-roofed the garage with my uncles – making up for my lack of skill with enthusiasm. I made pancakes with my Grandma O. I prayed every night for my Grandpa's healing. I was so happy surrounded by my family, contributing to the care of my grandparents. Although I didn't have the vocabulary for it at the time, that summer was a thin place for me where I felt a nearness to God.

At the same time as that joy, I was also deeply sad. That summer I learned what dying can look like.

Grandpa O. died that following October.

My grief was not negated by my joy. My joy was not negated by my grief. They lived together inside me.

Here we are on the second Sunday of Easter. We are left once again with an invitation to wrestle with “What does it all mean?” Jesus resurrection – so vast, so surprising, so abundant – what does it mean to us right now?

Earlier in the morning of Easter Day, the day of today’s gospel, Mary Magdalene had shown up and told the disciples that she had seen Jesus alive again. Jesus had appeared to her.

I imagine the disciples feel like they are riding a rollercoaster of emotions. Mary’s message tells of a hope that seems beyond what they can dare to consider. Our reading tells us they are afraid. *To be clear: the disciples feared the specific Jewish leaders who persecuted and crucified Jesus – not Jewish people in general.*

What are Jesus’ followers supposed to do now with what they have seen and experienced? They don’t know. They huddle together and lock the door.

Fortunately, Jesus, in whom we see God, is not kept out by locked doors. Jesus shows up with love and offers them peace. He shows them the marks of his crucifixion on his hands and his side. He breathes into them the Holy Spirit and sends them into the world.

When Thomas the Twin realizes that he missed out on all of this, he is understandably upset. He insists that he too must see Jesus and touch his wounds to believe.

Jesus obliges. He shows up again and invites Thomas to touch his wounds.

For many years, I have wondered there is so much focus on Jesus' wounds. I have wondered why Thomas insists on seeing a risen Jesus with the signs of his crucifixion. Why didn't Jesus heal them? Wouldn't that be a benefit of being God?

The summer before my Grandpa O.'s death is my entry into these questions. Jesus was there in *both* the joy and the pain of that summer.

Within the joy of resurrection we know Jesus by his sacred story, including his pain. The full breadth of human experience is held within Jesus' time on earth. Through Jesus we know that God is with us in our darkest moments and in our joy. God has lived both.

We, too, as followers of Jesus are invited into that great joy, but it doesn't negate our own sacred stories, which include pain.

Jesus defeated death; death is a part of Jesus' story. Jesus is not calling us to eternally dwell in despair. Jesus is calling us to an awareness of how God shows up in every moment and offers us peace.

In our saddest moments, we can name that sadness *and* cling to the hope of the resurrection. We can pray for healing while knowing it doesn't ask us to erase the rough parts of our life. We can look for God's love and transformation in every moment.

We can abide with God.

In a time of social media photo filters that obscure the signs of our life lived, both good and bad, and messages of "all you need is a positive attitude for prosperity" - Jesus' resurrection is countercultural!

Jesus' resurrection is Good News!

The older I get, the more I find comfort and strength in this reality.

On this second Sunday of Easter with the Easter season before us, our question remains: how is Jesus' resurrection speaking to us?