

In the name of God, who through the Word and in the Spirit creates, redeems, and sanctifies.

Christ is risen! So now what?

I like these Sundays after major feasts; after we celebrate Jesus birth, or Jesus' resurrection, or the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, it's almost as if we're being goaded to ask, so what do we do now?

Today's readings are one of many answers to that question. I like to think of today's readings as lessons in practical hope. Yes, we can *feel* hopeful about something; but today's readings remind us that hope is also a spiritual practice.

We begin in the book of Acts; the writer is describing how the disciples of Jesus, after his death and resurrection, began to build themselves into a community of believers. "The apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it

at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”

Jesus' resurrection brought the kingdom of God very near, but it was not yet accomplished. How did these disciples make the hope of that new kingdom tangible, something that they, and anyone who encountered them, could see and touch? How did they make the hope of being one people under God's sovereign law of love come alive within them? They bore witness to Jesus' defeat of death, they received great grace, and they worked to make sure that no one was in need. They sought to build a community of equity. These disciples were reaching back to the words of the prophets and making sure that in their community everyone would be sheltered and fed and unafraid. They practiced the hope of the prophets so that it became visible and real.

These disciples began to practice hope by building a community based on equity; in the First Letter of John, we see another way in which they practiced hope: The disciples took a good honest look at themselves. In this letter, the writer is urging the disciples to take an honest look at their thoughts and actions, and to recognise what is not in accord with the love of God.

We have been given the hope of new life in Jesus, the hope of leaving behind whatever diminished and darkened the divine light within us. Practicing that hope doesn't mean beating ourselves up or to being burdened by guilt; this practiced hope of self-examination is to keep ourselves open to God's forgiveness, and the invitation to live more closely to the life and teaching of Jesus. The writer of this letter is reminding all of us that we can practice hope by being faithful and honest about ourselves and so receive the fullness of God's grace. And it is this grace that allows us to continue to do the work that Jesus began, and to bring God's kingdom even nearer.

Then in today's Gospel, we read how the apostle Thomas was working his way through the trauma of Jesus' death. I don't think of Thomas as a doubter; I think of him as a pragmatist, a very practical man. Throughout the Gospel of John, Thomas says very practical things and asks very practical questions. And in this passage that we read today, I think we can see Thomas practicing hope; Thomas is practicing hope by seeking a real encounter with the risen Christ. Thomas isn't relying on just what the other disciples said; Thomas is seeking to meet this risen Christ himself. That is an incredible way to practice hope. Just as building a community based on

equity, where all are sheltered, fed, and unafraid makes the hope of God's kingdom real, so does encountering the love of God embodied and alive make the hope of new and eternal life real. We encounter Jesus risen and alive when we witness to God's love among the poor, and among the outcast; we encounter Jesus risen and alive when we seek justice; we encounter Jesus risen and alive when we go off alone to a quiet place to pray; and we encounter the Jesus risen and live when we return from those quiet, prayerful places to serve the crowd of hungry and hurting people that live among us.

Work to build communities of equity; practice honest self-examination and receive forgiveness; seek encounters with the risen Christ; these are ways of practicing the hope given to us in Jesus' resurrection. And if we allow Jesus to be fully alive in us, we can bring that hope to those who have lost it. Amen.