

Easter Contrasts: “Getting Your Act Together!”

Dear Friends in Christ:

It’s a phrase I have often heard over the years and have spoken to others, most likely to my kids and even to myself, and probably along the way to some church members: ***“I wish you would get your act together!”***

The phrase is defined in The Free Dictionary as follows:

- *To take action to become well-organized, prepared, or in a better state of life. You need to get your act together...*
- *To organize one's thoughts, often with the aim of regaining one's calm. I really need to get my act together...*

- idioms.thefreedictionary.com

The phrase gave me a new lens to appreciate the moment the disciples were facing in today’s Gospel after the death and resurrection of Jesus. It was a truly a “crisis” moment in their lives, trying to confront the reality of the death of Jesus; afraid that the religious leaders would do the same to them; then struggling to comprehend the angel’s Easter proclamation: *“He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they have laid him.”* (Mark 16:6)

Talk about dealing with major change in your life; having a lot on your plate; too much happening at the

same time; trying to process grief and loss while grasping what the future might hold? Yes, the disciples really needed **“to get their act together”** - to get their thoughts organized and regain their calm!

We can all relate to such moments and times of crisis, certainly needing to find purpose and calm in this past pandemic year when we've felt exposed, isolated and afraid? Is it not a life journey we all take *“walking through the valley of the shadows”* - be it death or disappointment; sin and setback; conflict or loss? Have we all not hopped *“on and off”* that rollercoaster of emotions marked by the highs and lows of denial - anger - bargaining – depression – and acceptance? It's often been our cry and plea and prayer: **“O Lord, help me get my act together!”**

And the good news today...God does help! It is so evident in the Gospel Lesson as Jesus confronts and contrasts the confusion and fear of the disciples.

*On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for **fear** of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “**Peace** be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. (John 20:19-20)*

If I was teaching this lesson in a Bible class upstairs, I would help you **“get your act together”** by asking you to take out a highlighter or pencil, marking or underlining two contrasting words in this text: **“fear”** and **“peace!”**

Some things in life are just like that, aren't they; like a toggle switch; back and forth - fear and peace, anxiety and calm! But when Jesus enters the equation, the reality changes, because there is understanding and hope; light at the end of the tunnel; strength equal to the burden of the day; grace sufficient for every weakness because this Jesus who was crucified and died has risen, defeating sin, Satan and death, promising to *“be with [His followers]until He comes again!”* (Matthew 28:20)

Yes, the *“fear”* is real...but so is the Risen Savior's promise of *“peace!”* It's *“peace”* that surpasses all human understanding; it is *“inner calm”* even when life seems to be spiraling downward; it is unbridled *“hope”* even in the midst of trying circumstances; it's a *“positive outlook”* no matter how dreadful today's news; it's a perspective of *“faith”* centered on the Christ who resides in our hearts, that precious voice whispering in the midst of the moment: *“Peace be with you!”*

Now, let's take a peek at the other two contrasts in today's Gospel.

“Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” (John 20:24-25)

Here's where you highlight and underline two more words in your Bible: **“unless”** and **“believe.”**

Thomas, often called the doubter, though Scripture never gives him that moniker, is still working on **“getting his act together!”** So, note what follows:

*“Eight days later, the disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, [note, the disciples still didn’t have their act totally together, yet!] Jesus came and stood among them and said, [again!] “Peace be with you.” Here the Risen Lord is once more offering re-assurance and calm; forgiveness; and understanding! “Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but **believe.**’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:26-28)*

What a revelation of the Lord’s patient and redeeming love, not only with Thomas and the disciples, but also with us when we throw all of our **“unlesses”** at God! Is it not a part of the journey of spiritual growth and maturity that while we are **“yet sinners...yet getting our act together,”** throwing up roadblocks; caught up in a culture that says *“believe”* whatever you want; laying down ultimatums that have the audacity to challenge what the Almighty can do; questioning the authority of His Word, and doubting His promises - there is Jesus offering calm and peace: *“Blessed are those who have not seen, yet **believe!**”*

As John concludes this Gospel writing it so evident and clear that he, and the disciples, finally **“got their act together!”** If you ever have any doubts about these locked up, huddled, fearful and timid disciples then read

the Book of Acts as your devotional this week! You will witness with stunning clarity how, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they proclaimed and lived the word and love of the crucified and risen Christ! No wonder John concludes:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31)

Easter contrasts: “fear” and “peace!” - “unless” and “believe.” I invite and urge you to embrace that tension, even the questioning and doubting, especially in crisis moments when fear seems to be robbing you of peace and hope; when sin seems to have the better of you and “**you need to get your act together!**” It is precisely in such moments, hiding behind locked doors; overwhelmed by grief and loss; wandering through the wilderness of sin and disobedience that God can intrude and do His best work in our lives...the Holy Spirit unleashed through Word and Sacrament, enabling us by God’s grace through faith to confess our sins and hear Jesus saying “*Peace be with you. Blessed are those who have not seen, yet believe!*”

Will you pray with me...

Heavenly Father, make our joy complete today, by turning our eyes to see Jesus, who lived the life we couldn’t; died the death our sin deserved, and rose again on Easter morn to give us everlasting pardon and peace. It is your presence in our lives and your loving promise to be with us always that helps us get our act together! In the bold name of Jesus we pray and say: The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia. AMEN!