



**At A Distance – Easter 2, April 19, 2020**

**“The Jesus Way” – Season 2 / Episode 1**

Greetings Saints and welcome again today to All Saints Episcopal Church in Vancouver, Washington. It has been a most amazing Easter Week here in Vancouver with the sun shining each day and beautiful warm spring temperatures. We follow the weather “back home in Montana” as well, and Mona and I see the normal “Easter Snow,” cold winds and temperatures in the 20’s. Again, perfect weather for spring calving season. So, prayers to the ranch families battling their storm, and prayers as well for all of us battling our viral storm this spring like so many others around the nation and the world.

There are many and diverse ways that each of us is “getting through” these trying times of isolation and social distance. By now all the garages are clean and tidy. Our closets reorganized by size, color and style. Guys, our “sock drawer” catch-all’s are newly organized. Trees are trimmed, vegetables and flowers planted. Now What?

One of the ways that a lot of us are getting through the “next chapter” of these trying times is “binge-watching” favorite, and newly discovered favorites series on Netflix. Unapologetically, so far Mona and I have completed the following series: Ozark; Queen Sugar; The Crown; You; Tiger King; The Stranger; Spinning Out and Greenleaf...and we are still going strong. One of the things with “binge-watching” or now the more politically correct name, “Express Watching” is that we can blast through multiple episodes and multiple seasons sometimes in one

sitting. The alternative extended-view technique had us waiting in impatient expectation all summer for the next season after the final cataclysmic episode of the season. After “binge-watching” for a while one acquires a new skill...guessing if the episode just watched was a “season-ender.” Usually, in a “season-ending” episode the level of drama escalates exponentially, usually with a classic “cliff-hanger” ending that makes us longingly wait all summer for the next season to begin...or in the case of the “binge/express watcher” as long as it takes to pop the next bucket of Orville Redenbacher’s in the microwave.

And so today, we return to our “Jesus Way” series that we have been watching voraciously unfold through the Gospel stories for the last 40 Days of Lent and into Holy Week.

Let’s do a quick recap of Season 1 highlights. The Jesus Way starts with Jesus’ Vision Quest in the desert and we learn of His call to public ministry. Next, we see Jesus and John the Baptist in the Jordan river as Jesus leads by example, is baptized, and we hear God from the Clouds. Next, there is the amazing episode with the Family Reunion on the Mountain when Jesus and Moses and Elijah are Transfigured. Then, the raising of Lazarus, the triumphal march into Jerusalem, the Drama of Jesus’ Wednesday betrayal by Judas, The First Supper, and finally Jesus’ abduction, trial, crucifixion and death. Then, Season 1 ended in spectacular fashion, with Mary Magdalene and some of Jesus’ Disciples returning to Jesus’ tomb and finding the stone miraculously rolled away, and the Tomb empty. Then amazingly Jesus appears to Mary and tells her to go and tell this startling news to the other Disciples and that Jesus will see them later in Galilee. As the curtain goes down on Season 1, we see Mary in excited conversation with an unbelieving Peter...repeating over and over “He is Risen, He is Risen, He is risen!

And now, The Jesus Way – Season 2 is finally here. What can possibly happen now? Has Jesus truly been Resurrected? What will happen to the disciples? Will the Romans and Jewish leaders round them all up and “finish the Job”? So many questions, so many possibilities. Let’s Watch!

The opening scene is from today’s reading from Acts... with the Apostle Peter preaching with great courage, passion and boldness to a crowd of Jewish leaders. Peter is both chastising them for their unbelief and their unwillingness to understand that Jesus was the fulfiller of the Old Testament prophecies. We note as viewers, that this must be sometime in the future because the last time that we saw Peter in Season 1, he was cowering in fear around a charcoal fire on Good Friday morning firmly and repeatedly denying that he ever knew Jesus. We saw Peter dramatically fulfilling Jesus prophesy...” Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” We saw Peter, emotionally and spiritually destroyed, terrified and running to save himself...abandoning his faith, his friends and his Teacher. We saw Peter shaking his head in disbelief as Mary Magdalene proclaimed the Miracle of The Resurrection. So how do we get to **this** Peter that we see today? Strong, motivated, fearless, full of mighty language and action defending both Jesus and the Teachings of The Jesus Way. Where did this guy come from? We need a flashback to clear things up. And here it is in today’s Gospel from John.

John “flashes back” to early evening on the Sunday that the rock was rolled away, and Jesus mysteriously disappears from the tomb. Has the body been stolen, has Jesus truly been resurrected as He predicted? John paints the scene for us...

***When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of***

***the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.***

So here we learn the secret of the courageous Peter that we saw just earlier. We learn that yes, indeed, Jesus has been raised from the dead, not swept away by grave robbers. Jesus appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room through a locked door, showed the amazed Disciples His wounds and then gifted them yet again. John says that "Jesus breathed on them and said to them "Receive the Holy Spirit". And from that very moment, Peter was never the same again. We see the new Peter, the courageous Peter, the spiritually renewed and spiritually alive Peter, preaching, teaching, exhorting, challenging. Never again hiding. Peter, Spirit-filled, living fully into his role as Jesus said.... but up until now Peter never really believed" You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." The Jesus Way – Season 2 wow! Off to an amazing start with Peter's transformation.

Now we are introduced to a new character, who we don't really know much about yet...Thomas the Apostle. We learn that Thomas is not present in the Upper Room when the Disciples saw the resurrected Jesus and were filled and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. When Thomas returns and hears yet another amazing story, he is reluctant to believe. A resurrected Jesus, a Sanctifying Spirit? What is possibly going on! Thomas is not having any of it! Thomas the realist, the cynic the pragmatist.

*"But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, 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 the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."*

*A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."*

Strong and powerful messages for us this week from The Jesus Way, Season 2-Episode 1. First, Peter's transformation, Peter's metamorphosis, Peter's finally living into his potential and his role as Leader of the Jesus Way. Peter becoming the "Rock" rather than the "Runner". All because of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit Peter was transformed. And like Peter, with the Holy Spirit we too are made new, so that nothing is impossible, and we can now also fully live into **our** Sacred Vision of how we walk the Jesus Way. When we ask for, and accept the help of the Holy Spirit in our lives, our Vision Quest truly begins.

And then we have Thomas. Thomas never really had to believe because all the evidence that Thomas needed was placed right before his eyes. Irrefutable, undeniable, overwhelming. Thomas didn't have to believe, he just had to look. And Jesus calls Thomas to task for this; **"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."** Jesus is speaking here about us and about the

generations of Believers ***who said yes to the Jesus Way***...even without all the answers.

Today, Blessed Ones, our faith and resolve in the Jesus Way has blessed us. By your presence here today, and by again and again inviting the Holy Spirit into your lives and families, you have again said “yes” to the Holy Spirit and to the Jesus Way and today, like Peter, our Holy Spirit has sanctified us mightily.

***Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.***

I can't wait to see what happens in Episode 3!

Blessings, Father Joe