

Think about how the first Easter began. Several disciples saw an empty tomb and Mary talked with the risen Jesus. There was obvious confusion and disbelief, as the disciples kept hiding behind locked doors. They were confused by what didn't make sense. And so, they created a tomb in an upper room, locked the doors, and hid in the dark.

Maybe they feared being accused of stealing Jesus' body. Or maybe they thought Mary, Peter and John were so overwhelmed by grief they had concocted a story to make themselves feel better. They were simply overwhelmed and didn't know what to think, feel, or say. And without realizing it, they returned to the darkness of Good Friday. Were they more afraid of being arrested or of not being believed? And how did their own fears become more powerful than an empty tomb? And to be honest, realize how easily that can happen to us as well!

What happens when we face death? How do we handle our grief? Our fears? Our worry about tomorrow? All of us who have faced this most terrible of earthly darkness knows all we want to do is hide, cry, and be left alone. Nothing anyone says can change what we feel in death or the fear or guilt we encounter as we try to move forward. Remember, we do that even though we know the Easter story. This was the first time disciples had come face to face with it. Of course, they were confused and hid!

It was time for another miracle. This one would be a doozy! A second Easter! A miracle of cosmic proportion! Having freed himself from a locked tomb, Jesus returned to the *upper-room-tomb* his followers had refused to leave. What Jesus began on Easter, he completed by freeing disciples from what trapped them in silence.

And the power of that freedom Jesus brought only grew. Within two months those same disciples were fearless, bold, unrestrained in their witness! Nothing could slow them down. Nothing could hold them back. Even the threat of prison couldn't keep them from telling over and over again what Jesus had done. Day after day, the authorities would attempt to silence that witness.

But jail cells and confinement couldn't keep them quiet -- just as the heavy stone at the tomb couldn't keep Jesus from life! What changed? The blindfolds and gags had definitely been removed, just as the stone was rolled from the tomb. It is amazing how quickly things turned around.

Jesus breathed on them, saying, "Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." This fresh wind was God's own breath. It was the sound of death being shattered -- the wind of creation! It flashed like lightning; roared like thunder! Pentecost revealed the outpouring of this spirit-breath as looking like tongues of fire and sounding like a rushing wind.

He took off their blindfolds and removed the gag from their mouths. They had been learning at the master's feet; now they were to be missionaries, simply telling what they had heard and seen and letting God to the rest. This gift is the gift of God himself, not only living in our midst but also breathing every breath of life like us. This Easter miracle unlocked their hearts and lives, just as it can do for us!

Like a ventilator or someone doing CPR, he matches our heart rhythm and is harmony with every breath we take. The disciples were no longer afraid because they were not

alone. God would free them from earthly prisons as surely as he would free them from earthly death. And so, it is for us!

This is the same breath that filled Adam's life. That rescued Noah from a flood and Jonah from a whale. This is the thunder of Sinai and the gentle breeze of a conversation with a woman at a well. The victory is complete and now WE are sent with the Good News that death and life need not ever be the same. Nothing can cloud our vision. Nothing can restrain our joy. He is risen. Risen indeed!

Now, were these your thoughts as you rolled over in bed and wondered whether it really was time to get up? Is this the power that carries you through frustrating traffic or allows you to smile as you pay your bills? The issue I raise this morning is a simple one. How will each of us walk away from Easter? What will change because of an empty tomb? How will such good news be reflected in what I see and say? Is there an Easter-effect in my living, or will I simply retreat to the comfort of an upper room?

One day when Mark and Katie were little, I was given too much change at a McDonalds drive through. Way too much change! It was tempting to hang onto but gave it back. No big deal, except about five minutes later the kids asked why did you do that? I was caught off guard, not knowing that they had noticed. So, I explained.

It became a lesson for them, but the bigger lesson was for me. What would my kids have learned had I kept that change? I didn't even know they were watching or taking notice. But they were, just as people do for each one of us each and every day. You see, it isn't enough to believe the Easter good news, we are called to be changed by that empty tomb in all that we do! Anyone can believe, but we are called to not keep that truth locked behind closed doors or hidden by silence and fear.

How often are we like disciples in the upper room, living with blindfolds and gag orders? Do we close our eyes? Keep silent when we could witness? How often are we frightened and fearful of restrictions imposed on our witness? Hesitant to let others know who I really am and what I believe? How often do I allow the world around me to dictate whether or not I witness Christ?

From the moment of Baptism, the risen Christ stands beside us breathing his life into ours. His words are simple and pure. "Peace be with you." What a breath of fresh air. What a precious gift of life. And his next words give us a mission. "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

Remember when we first wrestled with a virus that caused everyone to be separated from each other. We felt it was best to be locked up, hidden, and protected from its reach. Jesus has made it clear that his good news can set every person free, if only they can be touched by the warmth and peace of his love. And each of us has the call to help let that light shine.

Too often life, and the brokenness it shares locks people into selfishness, anger, hopelessness, and fear. Jesus' goal is to unlock that darkness with the miracle of his love. And why would we not want to help?

Go in peace. Serve the Lord. That is not a cute catchphrase but an invitation for each of us to help welcome people into the light.