

“It’s Personal”

I suspect everyone has heard the saying, “It’s not personal, it’s business!” Maybe you only saw it in one of the Godfather movies. Or, perhaps, you were the person being hurt in a business transaction and the person profiting from it used that saying. Or, perhaps, you have heard one of the current presidential candidates using the saying – maybe even, before becoming a candidate. Many times that saying has been portrayed as being what comes along, almost as an apology, with the extremely bad news of being fired or laid off.

Today, I’m not going to focus on that very insensitive and self-serving statement but on an opposite of it. **It’s Personal.** As we consider the Gospel Lectionary Reading for this Second Sunday of Easter or as we have called it our Second Easter Celebration, let me propose that what our Scripture reports can be summed up as “It’s Personal.” Now, that may seem a bit strange, since the scene might appear to be like what one would expect to experience at a top notch magician’s performance. The Gospel of John’s description of the two visits of the Risen Jesus with his original disciples is very terse, especially given John’s usual lengthily presentations. The set up also seems to emphasize the setting’s aspects, which heighten the mysterious or magical nature of those events. Such as, the doors were locked yet the Risen Jesus just appeared out of thin air! We are also tempted to believe there was no real Personal interactions between him and his disciples. Of course, we assume, they were all so shocked to see him alive after they saw him die on the cross! Yet, even the brief description from the Gospel of John provides us clues – ways to read between the lines.

For example, it reports in the later part of **verse 19 through verse 23**, *“Then Jesus came and stood among them. ‘Peace be with you,’ he said. After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.’ Then he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’”*

The author of the Gospel of John did not tell us anything the disciples said on that occasion. He declared they rejoiced at seeing him but that is it. No report of the disciples’ conversations with him nor any of their actions. Yet, there are some of those clues I referred to earlier in these verses. He comforted their fear at seeing him in such an extraordinary way by announcing, “Shalom – Peace!” Then, and here is where he got very Personal with them, he showed them his wounds – his scars! How could he have been more Personal with them? I suspect they touched him where the nails had been driven through his body and the spot where the lance had been thrust into his side! Do you remember when a parent or grandparent kissed your wound or when you kissed a hurt spot on your child or grandchild? That is what one, in such a close relationship, does – it is very intimate and Personal and defines your relationship with the parent or grandparent, who kisses your wound, or your child or grandchild, whose injured place you kiss. How could you appropriately be more Personal? Jesus did not just show his disciples his wounds from a distance to prove his identity to them. Instead, he “showed them” his wounds. Given what he later said to Thomas, he invited them to touch his injuries from the nails and his pierced side from the lance. How could he have been more Personal?

Then, Jesus blessed them again with the word, “Shalom – Peace” – a clear indication they might have another reason to be afraid! But of what? Jesus issued them their Call – “As the Father sent me, so I send you.” Again, how much more Personal could he have been with them than as his “Father” – our Creator had been with him in sending him?

Jesus “breathed on them”! Once again, he had to be very close and Personal with them to do that – who do you let breathe on you? Jesus went on to say to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Now, it is possible to think that Jesus was not being Personal when he said that, except, he continued speaking, “If you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” Did that seem to come out of nowhere to you? How could you or I be more Personal with someone than to forgive him or her or to be forgiven by her or him? Relationships are healed and redeemed through forgiveness – which, of course is very much what God

did for all of us by forgiving us and sending the Son of God into the world to reveal our New Relationship with our Divine Parent!

One of Jesus' original disciples was not present when Jesus appeared to the rest of them on that Easter evening. They told Thomas about their experience but he declared he had to have his own Personal moment with the Risen Jesus! **In verse 25, "Thomas said to them, 'Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'"** Thomas demanded the Risen Jesus be Personal with him! Thomas was very specific about the very Personal actions he demanded he be allowed to take. Those activities were most likely what the other disciples reported to him that they had done when the Risen Jesus appeared to them on Easter evening.

The Gospel of John reported Thomas had his opportunity to be Personal with the Risen Jesus a week later. **Verses 26-27 state, "The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!'"** Jesus' "Shalom – Peace" was a blessing and comforting of Thomas' fear, just as Jesus did the same for the other disciples a week earlier. Clearly, the Resurrected Jesus knew what Thomas expected either because the Lord had witnessed what the others did when he previously appeared to them and/or what Thomas had stated to the others as what Thomas would have to also do to believe Jesus was Raised. Jesus punctuated his disappointment that Thomas had refused to have faith based on the Personal Testimony of the other original disciples. So, the Risen Son of God declared, "Stop your doubting and believe!"

During this appearance of the Risen Lord, unlike the previous encounter between Jesus with the other original disciples, we are told what Thomas had to say during this confrontation a week later. **In verse 28, "Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'"** I suspect Thomas pushed aside his previous demands, since they were so prominent and the Gospel does not mention him doing what he had demanded.

The Gospel of John reports in verse 29, "Jesus said to him, 'Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!'" Jesus' act of getting very Personal with his disciples was not about providing visual proof of his Resurrection. It was very much about redeeming and renewing their Relationship with him! If being Personal with God and Jesus required visual proof of him being alive, then every potential Christian following Jesus' return to the Divine Parent would be incapable of being in a Faith Relationship with the Risen and Ascended Son of God, Jesus the Christ. Every Christians' ability to be in a Faith Relationship – a very Personal Relationship with God and Jesus depends on our coming to experience the Personal Relationship previous Christians and the original disciples had with Jesus. We need their testimony to demonstrate their Personal Faith Relationship with Jesus Christ. Some of that is found in the New Testament Scriptures. Some of it is observed by us in the lives and testimonies of our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. That brings us back to the Call the Risen Jesus gave the 10 original disciples on Easter evening. He charged them, **"Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you."**

If that Personal excitement and commitment is not communicated, then our friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, and acquaintances will have no reason to trust in the New Testament Testimony about Jesus Christ. The original disciples and a multitude of generations of Christians in the past and into the future had or will have a Personal Relationship with Jesus because they received a Personal Faith Relationship encounter with another, who also had a Personal Faith Relationship with the Risen Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus Christ is not some abstract super hero but a real person, who opened up himself Personally to his original disciples, so they could pass on his Personal Faith Relationship with all future generations of Christians. Jesus Christ is your and my Personal Lord and Savior – he Personally relates with you and me, so we join him in the New Personal Faith Relationship with God, which is given to us through the Grace of God – God's Forgiveness without us meriting it and God's Self-Giving and Sacrificial Agape Love demonstrated in the Son of God's Crucifixion and Resurrection. We come to our Faith Relationship with the Risen Jesus Christ because of his Committed Personal Relationship with us and not because we have had visual proof of his Resurrection. For you and me our Faith Relationship with the Risen Jesus Christ – **It's Personal!** Amen.