

2 Easter 2003
Fill 'er Up
Br. John Ogle, FBC

Good morning. It's great to be here at St. Peter's.

You may think that's just something I feel like good manners requires me to say ...but it's not. It's true. I AM glad to be here.

There's something going on here. There's an energy ..an enthusiasm ..a thirst for more ..there's no fear.

In fact that could be the motto of St. Peter's. NO FEAR.

Every time I come here there are a few more faces I didn't see before. Every time I turn around there's a new study group ..or forum ..or liturgy happening. I have yet to hear that ancient Episcopal Church growth killer "we've always done it THIS way." Which really means ..sit down ..shut up ..and get over it ..and implies ..if you don't like it find yourself another church.

Here at St. Peter's we have the "PEACE process." Do many of you remember what happened when the PEACE was first added to the liturgy? A lot of people were appalled. "You want me to touch a stranger?" Some stood stoically ..arms crossed muttering "I don't believe it that." Now ..there are times the clergy have all they can do to get on with the service ..not only do we shake hands ..there's hugging going on ..and all this smiling ..all this Loving One Another.

In today's Gospel we hear about what happened AFTER the Christ was crucified ..died and was buried ..and on the third day rose from the dead.

Imagine what it must have been like to be one of the disciples. The events of the last month have been overwhelming. One day you're part of the fastest growing religious movement in the country ..the next day your leader has been hauled through a trial that was a mockery of justice and crucified. Hung up like a common criminal with a sign that said "King of the Jews" and made little of all you have come to believe.

And then ..there He is. In the FLESH ..and that's important ..in the FLESH.

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you"

Jesus offering His Peace and charging them to continue His teaching ..His ministry of love ..hope ..healing ..and His message of eternal life. The Great Commission.

And ..providing the tools to do the job. Christ simply breathes on 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.”

The gift of the Holy Spirit. Doesn't matter who you are ..how much you know ..what you do for a living. God gives Peter ..a fisherman with a tendency to open his mouth before engaging his brain ..a man of no formal education or religious training ..the words to proclaim the Gospel ..to teach what he has learned.

Thomas isn't so sure. I think ..if we're honest ..we can identify with what he's feeling. How many times have you heard “if it's too good to be true ..it probably isn't.” But Jesus urges him to see AND TOUCH his wounds.

“Do not doubt, but believe.”

Thomas answers “ My Lord and my God!” You can imagine the kind of enthusiasm that must have swept the room. And, I know YOU can imagine it ..because it's happening right now.

The great appeal ..for me ..of St. Peter's ..is the sense that the Holy Spirit is present ..and doing a great work. This is more than a place to go through the motions of Sunday morning ..the liturgy ..and to get a cup of coffee and a little something to eat.

The enthusiasm that compelled the disciples is here ..now. “Do not doubt, but believe” and then act on what you believe. How did you react to the stories of Easter? Did you believe? Or is the resurrection something you kind of hear about but ..in your heart ..can't accept as fact?

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

If you heard about a gas station that was giving away gasoline ..Free ..would you just get half a tank? No ..you fill 'er up. And ..thank God ..you act that way here in church. As more of the knowledge and love of Christ is made available ..through sermons, forums, discussion groups, Bible studies, Sunday school, music ..and even Online ..the people of St. Peter's enthusiastically FILL 'ER UP!

You'll want a full tank for your Spiritual Journey. There's no such thing as too much. As you embrace the Savior ..He embraces you. He offers you what He gave the disciples ..what He died to make available.

Forgiveness of Sin. Peace that passes understanding.

Now ..as the FUEL of the SPIRIT is being poured out ..free ..it's important not to have anything in the way ..that fuel needs to get into the tank ..into your heart

..your mind ..it needs to be the driving force of your life ..to inform ALL of your understandings and undertakings.

Did your Lenten discipline stick? It's all well and good to give something up for 40 days ..but if you gave it up ..do you really need it?

We learned from John's Letter:

"For the Love of God is this, obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith."

Our Faith is based in the Love of Christ.

f the discipline of Lent ..the stories of Holy Week ..and the Joy of the Resurrection led to the Light of Christ shining into some of the dark corners of your life ..take the next step.

NO FEAR. Even if you didn't make it all the way through Lent without giving in to temptation. Even if you aren't well versed in the scriptures ..even if you say "I don't even know how to pray." What you have you can give. You can, as St. Francis said, "teach the Gospel at all times ..when necessary ..use words." Live what you believe and you're on the way to do the work you were sent to do. Do not leave undone those things which you ought to have done.

Ask Christ to heal you.

You may have been the one who avoided the flu this winter ..you may not have any noticeable disease of the body or the mind ..your marriage may be going along fine ..but is there that "other thing" you can't seem to shake? The booze you like a little too much ..the prescription drugs you can't live without even though the pain is long gone ...the pornography that pours from even unsuspecting computers like so much sewage ..the resentment you harbor for so and so who offended or wronged you by doing such and such ..whatever secret sin you forget or ignore isn't secret to God ..whatever it is ..could be something you don't even understand ..it needs to go ..you need to be healed. If you say "I don't need healing" you may need it more than anyone.

In the healing ministry ..Dr. Rufus Womble preaches that we don't get sick unless something has gone wrong ..something is contagious ..the atmosphere is bad ..we're injured ..we're angry. In fact, anger is always ready to do it's destructive work. Our purpose here today is to get well.

We pray to God ..because we believe He wants us to be well. We pray knowing you don't have to be perfect to be forgiven ..to be healed and made whole in Christ.

We are the body of Christ ..praying together today. There's tremendous power in that. It's important as we go through the laying on of hands that everyone in the Church remain focused ..remain in prayer.

Five things it may help you to remember:

1. Be Aware of Jesus ..believe that the Holy Spirit is present ..here now with us.
2. You don't have to ask for anything. Trust Jesus. He will diagnose and give us what we need and what he wants us to have. Be Open. See with your mind's eye the healing Love of Christ flowing into your life ..breathe in the love and healing power ..until it overflows into the lives of the people you've been praying for.
3. Bring someone with you. Bring 'em here or bring 'em in your Heart ..or bring 'em next time.
4. Remember we are the body of Christ ..we are pooling our faith and giving ourselves ..praying together ..this is not one on one.
5. When we're finished. Thank God for the healing. Rufus taught me a little prayer ..why don't you repeat after me:

Thank you Father for your Healing Love
At work within me
Thank you Father for your Healing Love
At work within the other people here
Thank you Father for your Healing Love
At work throughout the nations of the world
Thank you Father for the Assurance of Victory

I Love you Father.
I Love your son Jesus.
And, I love your Holy Spirit.

Oh ..and be sure to tell somebody what God has done for you.

I had a remarkable experience last month. Rufus asked me to join him at the home of a man who had cancer. In September ..David ..had blurred vision ..an MRI found a massive ..malignant tumor on his brain. When we went to see him a month ago ..he was bedridden ..terribly thin ..and filled with fear. His wife Mary ..whom he'd loved since they met at age 13 ..was the brave soldier ..smiling through ..filled with fear. His sons ..30 and 25 ..weren't sure what to feel.

Rufus and I joined the family for prayer and the Eucharist. I anointed each one ..we laid hands on each one and prayed for healing. In clear language Rufus

..who lost his first wife to cancer ..let them know that recovery might not be the healing that came ..but repeated that we should always pray for and expect a miracle.

Finally Rufus laid hands on David ..prayed and taught him that little prayer. David's reaction was remarkable. His chest heaved ..his face was covered by a huge smile ..he said weakly "I feel something happening ..I don't know what it is ..I have to rest."

The bread and the wine that day were received with a kind of Joy I can't described. I Joy in the heart ..that relieved the mind.

Two weeks ago ..on a Sunday afternoon, David's wife's brother called me. David had died the night before and I was asked to get in touch with Rufus so we could conduct David's funeral. The next day we went to meet with the family ..Mary had been alternating between tears and anguish but she had a story to tell.

Each day ..after our first visit ..David had prayed the victory prayer. A few days before he died ..before he was unable to speak anymore ..he told Mary "I'm not afraid." She told us that from the moment of the laying on of hands ..he had felt NO PAIN ..and up till then it had been constant.

I can tell you from personal experience. The Healing is real. Your Life will change. You will be given more than you can ask or imagine ..so don't be afraid to "fill 'er up."
AMEN