

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Easter

April 27-28, 2019

Readings: Acts 5: 12-16; Revelations 1:9-11A, 12-13, 17-19; John 20: 19-31

Preacher: Kathi Piehler

His name is Bill. Or perhaps I should say his name *was* Bill, because Bill died this past fall at the age of 44, after a long struggle with brain cancer, leaving a wife and seven children.

His family once shared that he resisted going to Church in his younger days. Maybe you could say he was a “Doubting Thomas?”

Bill started out his adult life going down different paths: a couple years at a nearby university then teaching in a karate studio. But not until he met a man named Brian, who invited him to his church, did Bill, proverbially, put his finger in the print of the nails and his hand into Christ’s side. That is when his faith came alive. After that Bill went back to school, earned degrees in Theology and attended seminary. All this took place because of Brian’s invitation to join him in church and surround himself with The Believers.

You see that’s where Thomas, in today’s gospel, made *his* mistake. He separated himself from The Believers. He left his fellow apostles after Christ’s crucifixion. He went off to suffer alone the great loss of his friend, Jesus, and so he was not with the disciples—The Believers—the first time Jesus appeared in that locked room.

Isn’t that also the way with us sometimes?

We try to “go it alone” instead of surrounding ourselves with fellow believers. Whether we are suffering the loss of a loved one or a job; being the caregiver for our spouse or parent; struggling with a chronic illness ourselves; or even having a crisis of faith like Thomas—we need to realize those burdens are lightened by the faith community. For it is in the community, the Body of Christ, that we will truly meet Christ face to face because we believe in the existence of God within each of us. It is in the community of believers where we will gather the strength to carry on. It is in the community of believers that soul-friends are made.

Little did my friend, Bill, know what was ahead of him when he accepted Brian’s invitation to come to his church. Never in his wildest dreams did Bill imagine he would

hear the Lord's call to spread the Good News and respond, like Thomas: "My Lord and my God!"

But respond he did. Bill and his family bought a home in the inner city. And, like Thomas and the rest of the apostles after Christ's resurrection, Bill started sharing the Gospel message; first with his neighbors then reaching out to every house in that 19th Ward. He evangelized at several of the local colleges – reaching out to the doubting young adults with whom he could readily identify. Bill was constantly looking for new ways to reach more people—like using homemade videos that he posted on the Internet to spread Christ's gospel message for today's technology driven people. As the cancer sapped his strength he continued to be a missionary for Christ even from his hospital bed. He continued to speak of Christ's saving power to the doctors and nurses who were ministering to him in his final days. Like the Apostles, Bill's "church" was the streets of Rochester.

There were about 400 people at Bill's funeral. His family was overwhelmed by the amazing stories of Bill's passion for the Lord and his unabashed and unashamed zeal for sharing the Gospel message of the love, joy and peace of Jesus Christ.

I believe that Bill's story can't end here but what is the postscript (the P.S.) of Bill's life for each of us?

It is found in the early verses of today's Gospel: "Jesus said to them again: Peace be with you. *As the Father has sent me, I also send you.*" Just as the Apostles that day in the upper room were commissioned by Jesus to go forth and preach to all nations, each and every one of us by the authority of our Baptismal call are sent forth to do the same.

If along the journey we grow weary or experience the doubts of Thomas, may we never separate ourselves from the people of God, as Thomas learned in today's gospel—but rather continue to surround ourselves with The Believers, as Bill did. And once again, be affirmed that *He* is risen.

