

**Sermon by The Rev. Betsy Johns Roadman, 4/23/06**  
**St. Augustine's Church, Croton-on-Hudson, New York**  
**Text: John 20:19-31**

In just a few minutes, we'll be welcoming Angelina Fabian into our parish family through the sacrament of baptism. This is what we'll all say together after she's been doused with water and sealed with holy oil: "We receive you into the household of God."

How appropriate then, that this morning's story from the Gospel of John may well be a description of the very first household of God. The account takes place in a house, only days after Jesus is crucified, and not long after the disciples begin to believe that Jesus might have risen from the dead. They base this belief on reports of an empty tomb and on the word of Mary Magdalene, who has told them that she has seen the risen Lord.

The emotional atmosphere of the place must have been incredibly intense. These disciples of Jesus are fearful that they, as his followers, might very well meet the same fate that he had. Mingled with the fear was their continued grief over the fact and manner of Jesus' death. Add to that the sadness and disappointment that they must have been feeling about what Jesus' life and ministry had not accomplished, from their point of view. Some of them must have been deeply regretting their own failure as disciples when they'd run away at the very time Jesus needed them most. And yet, there's also a glimmer of hope that the reports that they're hearing are true, and that Jesus' death isn't the end of the story.

Into this gathering of the followers of Jesus, experiencing varying degrees of belief and disbelief, fear and hope, excitement and grief, regret and encouragement, comes the risen Christ. The disciples know that it's him – he shows them his wounded hands and side. The very first words that he speaks to this gathered group of his disciples in their overwhelming confusion of emotions are these: "Peace be with you."

This is amazing. Though the words themselves – peace be with you – are a traditional greeting, what the risen Christ doesn't say here is significant. He doesn't immediately rebuke his followers for their fear and uncertainty and disbelief. He doesn't reprimand them for the countless ways that they failed him. He knows exactly who they are and everything that they have and haven't done. And, still, he greets them as his beloved friends, and he offers them peace.

And that's just the beginning. To this very same group of people, Christ gives the gift of the Holy Spirit, to empower them to carry out the work of God in the world, just as he himself did.

In the story, Christ offers the peace, the presence, the power, and the commission of God to the gathered household of God not because they're successful, or 100% sure about their faith, or because they have a clear sense of what's expected of them. Christ offers the peace, the presence, the power, and the commission of God to these ordinary people because of who he is, and because he loves them.

And when Thomas misses the whole thing and won't believe that any of it's true unless he sees it for himself, even he isn't written off. Christ makes a special appearance back at that place; again, offering his peace, and he meets Thomas' demands – not because Thomas has proven that he deserves special treatment, but because Christ is who he is, and because Thomas is deeply loved.

We, here at St. A's, are a gathering of the household of God. Here among us today, some are dealing with personal circumstances that cause us to be anxious and fearful. Others are rejoicing. Among us, some are experiencing grief over a painful loss. Others are looking ahead to the future with great hope and anticipation. Some of us are reeling from a sense of perceived failure. Some are celebrating important accomplishments and milestones. A few of us may be experiencing our faith as rock-solid. Most are probably wondering where God is in at least some areas of our lives.

And the risen Christ is right here, in this gathering of the household of God, not because of who we are, but because of who he is, and because he loves us as we are. There is nothing that we can do that will make God love us more than God does right now, at this moment.

And there is absolutely nothing that we can do that will make God write us off.

The Episcopal Church baptizes both infants and those able to make their own profession of faith. It's incredibly special when young women like Kate and Claire Wixted, who were baptized at the Easter Vigil last weekend, decide for themselves to be baptized, making their own baptismal vows. And, it's deeply moving when we welcome a baby like Angelina into the household of God through baptism. In her case, it's clear that this relationship with God isn't about what she's done or hasn't done. It's about who God is. It's about what God has done through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's about God's love, and God's desire for relationship with us.

Our household of God here at St. A's will, in a moment, be increased by one because of God's love. In response to that love, and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, all of us are commissioned to do the work of God in the world.

What is the specific call of God in our lives right now? What is the plight of people in the world that wounds our hearts and ignites our desire to make a difference, in the name of God and through the power of God's spirit? What will be our response to that call?  
Amen.