

Biblical Background

JOHN 20:19-31

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: The Upper Room where Jesus and his disciples had shared the Last Supper in Jerusalem. The room is in the upper city, a rented space that was large enough to hold 120 persons at Pentecost. Today you can visit in the Christian Quarter of the Old City Jerusalem a room that is in the same area and would have been similar to the Upper Room as described in the scriptures.

TERMS: **Shalom** Peace be with you. A standard way to greet a person and to say goodbye. Rather like the use of Aloha in the same manner. A much fuller meaning than our English word "Peace". It connotes wholeness, the fullness of salvation realized in the whole person.

Didymus The Twin - most imagine that someone else looked like Thomas in the apostolic group. Some have wondered if he looked similar to Jesus. This might explain why Judas went to great pains to identify Jesus to those sent to arrest him in the dark garden of Gethsemane.

CULTURAL INSIGHTS: The doors were shut and locked out of fear. Doors in the Middle East are more commonly open to suggest that you have nothing to hide. To close a door and try to secure the closed door with a lock would suggest to some that you are guilty of something. This open door policy may be the result of coming from a nomadic lifestyle in the past where one lived in tents without doors.

INSIGHTS INTO MEANING: It is through the invitation to all the apostles to put your fingers in the wound that realizes for them the paschal mystery. Through the embrace of the cross, i.e. suffering, one finds their way through to liberation. The apostles are frozen or have fled after Jesus' crucifixion and death. We choose to deny our crosses, our pains or avoid them. It is through the door of human suffering and death that the liberation of everlasting life is revealed. Through this invitation Jesus liberates the apostles, offers them Peace, Salvation. He breathes upon them the power of the Holy Spirit. The power and presence of God is invisible yet evident within each believer. Thomas does not need to touch Jesus to believe but the invitation to the wounded Jesus is the way to resurrected life. In this way he is the Apostle who does not "doubt" although we call him "Doubting Thomas" just the same. This is a curious reflection on the nature of the text. We read it but do not really see that Thomas is honored by Jesus.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: How might you experience the help of the Holy Spirit as your Unimaginary Friend?

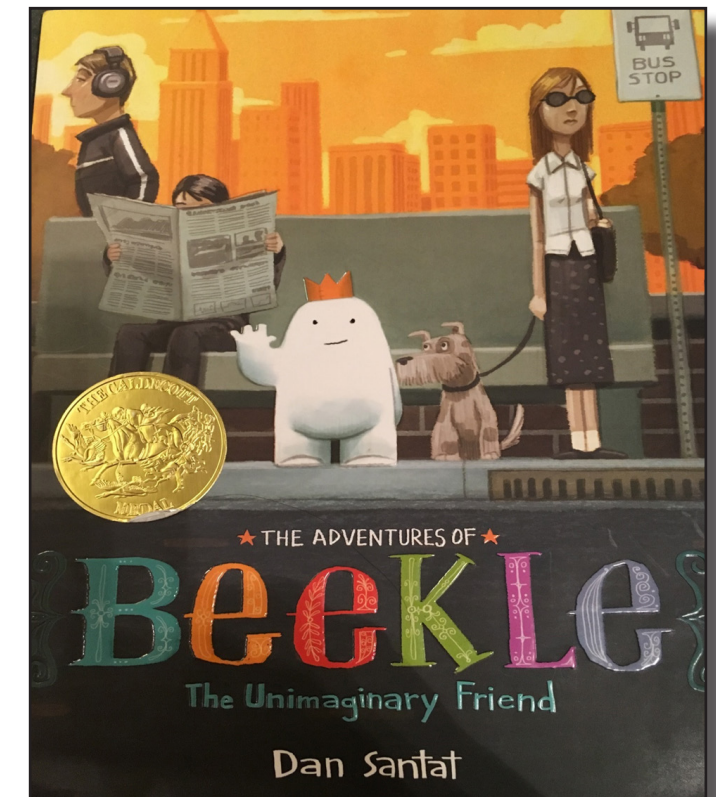
GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES: PRACTICING THE PRESENCE
STRENGTH FROM WITHIN

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: Share and collect stories of the ways people have experienced God's presence and help in their lives, times when they can feel God even though they can't see God. Make a list of a family when you have seen or heard about people doing extraordinary things. Where do you think their strength came from. What kind of effects did their belief leave behind?

CYCLE C 2ND SUNDAY
OF EASTER

Living Grace

"IN JESUS' RISING THE UNIMAGINABLE
BECOMES REAL!"



The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend is a humorous and thoughtful celebration of friends. This magical story begins on an island far away where an imaginary friend is born. He patiently waits his turn to be chosen by a real child, but when he is overlooked time and again, he sets off on an incredible journey to the bustling city, where he finally meets his perfect match. The story combines classic storytelling with breathtaking art in an unforgettable tale about friendship, imagination, and the courage to find one's place in the world.

Art & Faith

CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION
OF SACRED ART



REUNION ~ THOMAS AND CHRIST
Bronze sculpture by Ernst Barlach ~ 1926
St. Gertrude's Chapel ~ Gustrow, Germany

EXPLORING THE ART:

"DEGENERATE" ART

Ernst Heinrich Barlach was a German expressionist sculptor, medallist, printmaker and writer. Although he was a supporter of the war in the years leading to World War I, his participation in the war made him change his position, and he is mostly known for his sculptures protesting against the war. This created many conflicts during the rise of the Nazi Party, when most of his works were confiscated as degenerate art. Stylistically, his literary and artistic work would fall between the categories of twentieth-century Realism and Expressionism. Barlach's works often contain references to the Old and New Testament, whereby the artist stated that he "did not feel the compulsory sensibility for church and community for religious reasons, but rather from nature". The starting point for the scene was the point in the Gospel of John 20, 24-29, where Thomas meets the risen Christ. Since the Middle Ages there have been countless representations of this moment in Christian iconography.

Sunday Gospel

JOHN 20:19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week,
when the doors were locked, where the disciples were,
for fear of the Jews,
Jesus came and stood in their midst
and said to them, "Peace be with you."
When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.
The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit.
Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,
and whose sins you retain are retained."
Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve,
was not with them when Jesus came.
So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord."
But he said to them,
"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands
and put my finger into the nailmarks
and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."
Now a week later his disciples were again inside
and Thomas was with them.
Jesus came, although the doors were locked,
and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."
Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands,
and bring your hand and put it into my side,
and do not be unbelieving, but believe."
Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!"
Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."
Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples
that are not written in this book.
But these are written that you may come to believe
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

Read-aloud video link:

THE ADVENTURES OF BEEKLE: AN UNIMAGINARY FRIEND

Written & Illustrated by Dan Santat

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

THROUGH THE RISING OF JESUS AND THE SENDING OF THE SPIRIT, WE ARE GIVEN FOREVER AN UNIMAGINARY FRIEND.

Now in Easter Season, we live with Jesus the Risen Christ. It is difficult to believe in a reality that we cannot see, yet through faith, can feel. Can we believe if we cannot see?

In our gospel reading, we hear about the apostles, the closest friends of Jesus after the trauma of his death and burial. They are either hiding frozen in fright, or they have fled. All of these responses are normal reactions in response to trauma. In addition to their grief in losing Jesus, they fear that one of them would be killed next. Only one of them was there at the foot of the cross, John. The others are suffering the costs of betrayal, denial, and abandoning the one they pledged to follow. They could follow him in the good times, but not to the foot of the cross. We today all still deal with that challenge. Its great to follow Jesus when it leads you to friendship and fun, but to follow Jesus into the suffering and needs of those around us in another thing.

The very first things Jesus does when he enters the room, is to breathe Peace upon them. They were fearful, yet full of amazement and wonder. What happens next is amazing. They thought they were seeing a ghost, so Jesus invites them into his wounds. We too have to first look at the pain and hurt of how Jesus died, it was real, historically it happened! Jesus wants to first ground them, this is life, the human condition, it wounds us. Jesus then leads them from the point of his suffering and death, through to his resurrection. He breathes Peace, Wholeness, Shalom, Salvation upon them. In this is the whole point of his mission: He had to leave, so that the Holy Spirit could come. The Father sent him, and now he sends them. And now Jesus sends us, empowered in the Holy Spirit.

It's a big challenge to believe in a presence whom we cannot see, but can feel. Hopefully our story can help us imagine how this works. The imaginary friends longed to be called to earth to share their love and give strength to the people there, but they had to be invited. Beekle waited and waited and finally got impatient. God did to, he sent prophets and angels but the people still weren't getting it, so he sent his only Son. Like Beekle, Jesus walked among the people, but it took time for anyone to recognize him. But soon love broke through, and they were overjoyed in the presence and gift of each other.

One could call God our imaginary friend, but thanks to Jesus and the breathing of the Holy Spirit upon us, that the friend we feel so fully, is not in our imagination, this friend is what is true. The Holy Spirit is what is real, the Holy Spirit is our.....Unimaginary Friend!!

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: Do you feel it is hard to talk to God when you can't see him? Have you ever had an imaginary friend? How is life different with a friend? Is it nice with an imaginary friend as they can always be there for you? Is it nice too knowing that through the Holy Spirit God is always with you, and in you?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: How did Beekle get from the imaginary island to earth?

THE GOSPEL STORY: How did Jesus get from heaven to earth? Through God's son Jesus, God came to live on earth among people. Through Jesus, the gift of the Holy Spirit could stay on earth and live within all the baptized. What do you think about that? What are ways you can feel God even though you can't see him? Would you be more like Thomas having to see and touch Jesus before you could believe? Or would you be like John and go all the way to the cross with Jesus? Jesus loves them both.

How does Jesus relate to Thomas when he has to see to believe? How his response and the response of Jesus encourage us when we have a hard time with our faith?