

You may remember the controversy over a sketch done by Saturday Night Live several weeks ago called DJesus Uncrossed. In it Jesus rises from the tomb and in the style of Clint Eastwood or Arnold Schwarzenegger comes out with a gun and a machete and starts mowing down the Romans. The clip caused quite a stir and definitely crossed some lines. I think some advertisers pulled their support for Saturday Night Live because of it. The sketch is extremely irreverent and very gory. And yet there is a part of it that just seems right too. After all the cruel and gruesome things the Romans did to Jesus it feels like justice for Jesus to rise up and give them what's coming to them. I'd show the clip here, but it's certain to give kids nightmares. It's on You Tube if you want to watch it.

Instead of that I have a couple pictures I want to show you that have surfaced with the current gun control controversy that's sweeping our nation. Wherever you stand in it all, these two pictures speak to something inside of us - at least in me.

(Show pictures)

There's a toughness to these people. You don't want to mess with them. They've got power and they have no qualms about using it in whatever way they have to. The world is a tough place. They can take care of themselves. There's no room for mamby pamby softness in them.

I want to use these pictures to set the stage for looking at our gospel reading for today. Part of us does want to see Jesus taking it out on the bad guys for what they've done. Part of us wants Jesus to take a tough stand on evil and blast it away when it comes too close. And yet our gospel reading can sound like the opposite. There's no violence. There's no justice. There's no punishment or accountability for the bad guys. Jesus just greets his disciples by saying, "Peace be with you." He goes on to say, "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."

And remember, we are reading this bible passage today, one week after Easter. But the first part of it -when Thomas isn't there- takes place on Easter day itself. Given what has just happened in the last few days it's all so sweet it makes you

want to vomit. Jesus doesn't even get mad at his followers for being a bunch of cowardly failures! How are we supposed to follow Jesus with this model of forgiveness? We'd might as well write the word, "Welcome" on our backs and then lay down like a doormat so the world can wipe its feet on us.

First though, let's remember that this lavish forgiveness shown to the Romans, the Jews, and the disciples - in other words, everyone - also comes to us. Such is the inexhaustible willingness of God to forgive us.

And second, just because Jesus doesn't come out of the tomb with a machete in one hand and an assault rifle in the other doesn't mean he doesn't come out with a lot of power. When he meets with the disciples they didn't exactly sit down and play a game of tiddly-winks. He breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Who else does God breathe on? Adam. This is the breathe of life that Jesus is bringing to them. It is new life for a new beginning and a new creation.

And in case we forget, Jesus doesn't send these guys out on a mission of sowing wildflowers in the meadows. He sends them out to build the church. That might be a glorious task for us in these days, but it wasn't for them. Of the remaining 11 disciples in that room church tradition tells us that ten of them will be killed for their faith.

Yes, our gospel reading tells of a time of peace and forgiveness for the disciples, but it isn't a saccharine sweet scene. This is a scene of power and strength. This bunch of cowardly uneducated bunglers is getting transformed into a mission force for the kingdom of God.

Now, they are still going to make mistakes. Read what happens in the book of Acts.

And they are still going to fail. Read what happens in the book of Acts.

And they still don't understand everything. Again, read the book of Acts. But they have what it takes to get the job done.

In our lives of faith don't expect the world to turn into a meadow of wildflowers because you follow Jesus. And don't expect that you have to write the word "Welcome" on your back and lie down for the world to walk on you. But do expect the power of the Holy Spirit and the force of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus to be your guide.

God may not blow people away, like some people are saying we should do to North Korea right now. But God is up to something big, and no one is going to stop it: certainly not the massive armies of Rome, not an irreverent sketch on Saturday Night Live, not an old woman sitting on the porch with a shotgun, not a bunch of bearded guys in camouflage armed to the teeth.

And you are a part of God's big and powerful plans. God gives you the same power God gave the disciples. The power to bring life. The power to bring new creation. The power to restore. The power to live above the petty squabbles of the world. The power to look adversity in the face and say, "Stop me if you want. I'm part of something so big you can't stop

it." Believe it, or don't believe it. Trust it, or doubt it.  
God is still working.

God is working to save you, so that through you others may  
also be saved. Amen