

Second Sunday of Easter/April 28, 2019

Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31;

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"Peace Be With You"

Happy Easter to you all! We continue to celebrate the risen Christ among us, as we should every Sunday, for indeed we are an Easter people! And the resurrection appearance stories should be important to us and remind us to look for the presence of Christ in our own lives and time.

Our passage from John today is a continuation from Easter Sunday. It is still the first day of the week, the day Mary Magdalene found the tomb empty and had shared the news with Peter and the beloved disciple. They then ran to the tomb to find it as she had said. Empty, except for the grave clothes that were lying there. After they leave, she has an experience of the risen Jesus, who calls her by name, and instructs her to go and to tell the others. We don't hear how the others reacted to her story. But in Luke, you may recall, that when the women share their story of finding the empty tomb and angels who tell them Jesus has been raised, they are met with suspicion and disbelief from the other disciples. And in the first ending of Mark's gospel, the women don't even tell anyone about what they have experienced but instead flee in terror!

What I am trying to point out is that on that first Easter, on the day that Jesus was raised from death, his followers were not in a good place. They were upset, demoralized, disheartened, and fearful. And at the news brought by Mary Magdalene and the other women, they could feel nothing but confusion, suspicion, and to physically feel unsettled and discombobulated, to put it mildly. Their whole world had been turned upside down. All that they had hoped for had been ripped away, torn from them. And the one whom they had bet their lives on, whom they had staked everything on, who was supposed to be their Savior, was dead. And now, not even his corpse was present. He was gone.

Okay, so they've spent the whole day together, in that state of mind and heart. And that evening, they are behind locked doors, because they are afraid the authorities who had arrested and crucified their leader, will next come after them. They have good reason to be frightened.

Into that space, that place of fear and trepidation, that place of sorrow and bewilderment, Jesus comes to them. He enters without knocking - and probably a good thing, because that may have sent them through the roof! But seriously, the gospel writers go out of their way to tell us that he entered through locked doors, as if a ghost or spirit, and yet, very much a physical, bodily presence. This is the nature of the risen Christ that we are to understand.

And the first words that come out of his mouth are, *"Peace be with you."* He shows them his body, the wounds on his hands and his side, as if to prove that he is real, that it is really him. And then he says it again, a second time, *"Peace be with you."* He will say it a third time, a week later when Thomas is present, the triplet emphasizing the importance of these words.

Now, this isn't the first time Jesus had said this to his disciples. He had instructed them, when he had sent them out to the villages and towns, that as they entered a home, to say, *"Peace be to this house."* (Luke 10:5) And at the Last Supper he says to them, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not our hearts be troubled, neither*

let them be afraid." (John 14:27) And then, that same night, before they went out to Gethsemane, he said to them, "I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace." (John 16:33)

His words spoken here, may well remind them of when he had said these things to them earlier, but more importantly, they speak of the spirit that they, his disciples, are to embody, the spirit that they now receive from him.

They now are to be the people of Peace. No longer are they to know fear of the world, or of what the world can do to them, for he, has overcome the world. Those who were once frightened and bewildered and lost, now hold within them a spirit that can overcome everything. Thomas, who must have been of the most restless spirit, having missed the first appearance of their risen Lord, is now also filled with this peace. And that same peace is to be in the hearts of all those, even those who have not seen and touched him, who come to know and believe and find faith through this risen Christ.

I don't think we have a true appreciation of the importance peace is to have in our lives as people of faith. But look at how many of Paul's letters begin with *"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ."* Nearly all of them! It is clear that the greeting of peace was of paramount importance to the followers of the Way of Christ. They called one another to be people of courage, of hope, and of love, because they were convinced and convicted that the presence of their God, the Spirit of their risen teacher and Lord, would never abandon them. Even in death. It was this assurance that inspired the author of the first letter of John to declare, *"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." (I John 4:18)*

Of course, it doesn't mean that we are not going to ever know fear or be burdened with the cares of life, or confused or brought down to the depths of depression or discouragement. Certainly, this is the state of our nature as human beings. But our faith gives us a means of overcoming the troubles of this world. We can know that peace that Christ gives.

This past Holy Week, I was struggling. I was not feeling inspired. I was not feeling the joy that I thought I should be feeling with Easter coming. Perhaps I was just tired, maybe a bit burned out. But I couldn't seem to get myself up and out of my funk. I felt "dry" and my faith weak. But after the Good Friday service, we came home, and I had this strange urge to go downstairs and listen to a song on our record player. It is a song that my high school choir had sung and I have a record that we made my Junior year in high school.

The song is *"Ee'n So Lord Jesus Quickly Come"* by Paul Manz. It is inspired by the passage from Revelation we heard earlier and begins with the words, *"Peace be to you and grace from him, who freed us from our sins, who loved us all and shed his blood, that we might be saved."* I don't know exactly what it was, but listening to that, hearing those words, *"Peace be to you and grace from him"*, touched something deep within me. I felt that peace immediately in my heart and felt restored.

We often talk of peace, and we pass the peace during our worship services, as we should, but I wonder if we really know how important, how powerful that peace can be and what it is we are passing on to one another. In this season of Easter, may we take more care to consider the peace which Christ gives to us and make special efforts to share that peace, the spirit that is given us, with one another and to all we meet. For we are an Easter people, the people of peace. Amen.