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4/11/21—University Presbyterian Church
John 20:19-31

THE PEACE PARADOX

When the resurrected Jesus walks into that locked room, the first thing he offers is peace. On Easter evening the disciples have locked themselves in a room for fear that the same people who killed Jesus might just decide to come after them. And the resurrected Jesus suddenly appears to them. And twice he says to them, “Peace be with you.” Then a week later, Jesus again appears to them, this time when the disciple Thomas is also present, and again Jesus says to them, “Peace be with you.” Peace is Jesus’ Easter gift.

Peace is certainly a welcome gift. In the midst of our stressed out, troubled lives aren’t most of us seeking peace? We want peace in our homes, and peace in our communities, and peace in our world, and peace in our own hearts. Our personal search for peace is what drives people to meditate, to read self-help books, to undertake spiritual quests, to take vacations, to lose themselves in mindless TV, to lock the bathroom door and enjoy the quiet solitude of a hot bubble bath. The kind of peace we often seek is a placid tranquility, far from the stress of life. And that is the kind of peace we often seek from Christianity. Consider the appeal of Christmas and Easter—two holidays which are perceived as a kind of oasis of innocence, wonder, beauty, and joy from the harshness of life. If truth be told, are we not attracted to a religion that can make us feel better about ourselves and our world? And so an Easter spent in the company of nice people in a pretty sanctuary with beautiful music and a message about God’s love affords us a welcome kind of peace.

However, we should know better than to think this is the kind of peace Jesus offers us. In his final words to his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus says to them, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.” Jesus warns us that the kind of peace he offers us will be different than the kind of peace the world offers us. And so when he shows up again after the resurrection, when he shows up to his followers hiding behind locked doors and says three times, “peace be with you,” his disciples could have guessed that the peace Jesus was offering was more nuanced, more complex than simply personal tranquility.

Certainly, Jesus’ disciples did indeed need the gift of personal tranquility right at that moment. Traumatized by Jesus’ crucifixion, terrified for their own lives, and deeply ashamed of the ways they denied and abandoned Jesus, the disciples were in a state of anxiety and distress. But then Jesus entered the room, bringing calming love to their terror and offering peace instead of condemnation or judgement. His peace spoke to their personal distress.

But that was not the extent of the peace Jesus offered. Jesus did not want them to stay locked in that room forever. Jesus needed them to walk out of those doors and live out the gospel. He needed them to go into a complicated and complex world, into a suffering world, an unjust world, a world of misguided values, and to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ in *that* place. And living out the gospel is seldom tranquil or placid or calming.

What this means is that Jesus’ Easter gift is a complex peace. The peace Jesus offers us is indeed a peace that soothes our troubled souls when we are bent over with sorrow and distress, a peace that lifts us up with hope.

And it is also a peace in which Jesus says to us, “pick up your cross and follow me.” And we are led by Jesus into the difficult, challenging, and uncomfortable places where people suffer.

The peace Jesus offers us is a peace that comes from knowing God sees who you are and what you have done--and still loves you.

And it is a peace that demands you love and forgive your neighbor and even your enemy with the same grace.

The peace Jesus offers comes when you know that there is more to this world than what meets the eye--more than violence and ugliness and cruelty and domination. It is the peace that comes from believing that the God of life and love and beauty has triumphed over death and sin.

And it is the peace that will not accommodate lies, that calls us to face our own ugliness with honesty and to disturb the status quo by speaking the truth about the world around us.

The peace Jesus offers not only includes fixing a casserole for your sick neighbor. Jesus' peace also includes regarding the migrant from El Salvador, the man in Attica Correctional Facility, and the Senator of the opposite political party as your neighbor.

The peace Jesus reminds us that God is with us when we feel alone and scared.

And the peace of Jesus prompts those first believers in the Book of Acts to share their possessions and money with one another in an effort to live out economic justice.

Jesus offers those first disciples and us today a kind of peace that involves opening the doors we have locked and following him to the Resurrection. And Resurrection is about *new life*. You can't have new life without change. And change almost never conforms to the world's concept of peace—if by peace we mean what is tranquil and placid. Change is typically challenging, disruptive, uneasy, and upsetting.

It's like the line in the popular spiritual hymn, *Wade in the Water*. In the hymn we sing, "wade in the water, wade in the water children, wade in the water, *God's gonna trouble the water.*" God's gonna trouble the water. Resurrection doesn't give us placid waters.

Resurrection *troubles* the waters. We cannot know a resurrected life without troubling the waters in some way: without troubling our own personal lives—how we live, love, shop, spend, deal with conflicts, accept responsibility for our failures; and without our troubling the habits, and priorities, and values of our community. Resurrection *troubles* the waters.

That is the peace paradox. Christ brings us both kinds of peace. Christ brings peace that touches our deepest needs, calms our fears, forgives our profound shame, and restores our sense of wellbeing. And at the same time, Christ brings a peace that troubles the waters of our lives and our world.

That is Christ's Easter gift to you and to me: a resurrected life and the complex peace it brings.

So, peace be with you as you do the work of Jesus in the world.

Peace be with you as shoulder the heavy burdens of your heart.

Peace be with you as you speak up for the marginalized and the oppressed.

Peace be with you as you deal with anxiety and fear.

Peace be with you as you love your neighbor as yourself.

Peace be with you as you work to forgive others and yourself.

Peace be with you as you share your resources and your time.

Peace be with you as you pursue the new life in Christ.

May the peace of Christ be with you.