

THE RYTHYM AND FLOW OF PEACE

John 20: 19-29

What does peace mean to you? What would peace look like for you? We all know how critical peace is for our world as we witness war and conflict in many places on our screens and in news reports. But what about peace in our hearts?... How may peace be something that is not just an idea but an experience that flows into us and lives in us?

I believe that our gospel reading this morning is not just an account of how peace descends upon the disciples of Jesus as they encounter the risen Christ. I believe the story was written so that the reader – that is: you and me here and now, may experience something of the peace they did 2000 years ago. But that also means we have to be open to receive such peace. Are you ready to hear this story with that kind of intention? Are you ready for a greater flow of peace to enter you, heart and soul?...

OK then, what I'd like to do is reflect on the story itself and what it says, and then, I'd like us to experience it as a ritual called: guided meditation. So, let's begin...

The first words Jesus tells the disciples when he sees them and words he repeats throughout this account are these: Peace be with you, or better, peace be within you... But even this is inadequate. The English translation cannot capture the original words in Greek: *Eirenee Eimene*... This is because these words are not just meant to be understood, but heard and felt... The sound of them, the rhythm and flow of them, they are like liquid intended to seep deep into your spiritual pores... They are onomatopoeic, namely the meaning is carried by the sound... *Eirenee Eimene*... As you hear the words, as you repeat them within yourself and as you open yourself to receive them, they help create what they intend: Peace be within you... *Eirenee Eimene*...

But Jesus also engages the one big obstacle that stands in the way of peace for the disciples and for us: fear. Fear blocks peace from entering. Fear shuts the door tight so that peace cannot enter. But how does fear come into our lives? What does fear look like in our lives? How does fear rob us of real and life-giving peace in our lives? It's not about snapping our fingers so that all the reasons for our fear just evaporate because we will it so. No. Life is full of problems and challenges, and fear is real because there are legitimate reasons to be afraid. But is it possible to experience peace so that we face our challenges and work through our fears coming out wiser, more resilient, more compassionate, understanding, grounded, and caring? Is it possible to experience peace so that the negativity we carry such as guilt, shame and blame, anger, resentment and sarcasm, fatalism, cynicism and judgment... Can such negativity somehow be released and compassion for ourselves and others flow into our hearts?... hmm...

So then, Jesus engages the fear the disciples are imprisoned by as they huddle together trembling before the authorities, behind locked doors in a house in some undisclosed location. So what does Jesus offer them to unlock the doors of their hearts so that peace can enter in?

1) First of all, Jesus enters in and shows himself to them. They somehow see his hands and side and come to believe he is really alive and among them. To see is a physical act, but it is also a spiritual act. Without faith you cannot see and you cannot be open to see. Without faith, peace can never be something you're open to receive because fear prevents you from believing it is really possible. Do you believe Jesus is truly alive? Do you believe his life-giving energy as Holy Spirit is real energy? Do you believe peace can truly enter into the doors of your heart and mind? Or are the doors within too tightly locked up?...

2) Second, Jesus gives them a purpose: "As Abba has sent me, so I send you." "I was sent in love to establish love in a world fighting against it. My resurrection is a declaration that nothing can defeat love, for even when it is crushed because of hate and violence or it withers because of indifference, my love can rise up again and stronger as it gets passed around. I am here with you and I will live and flow in and through you as you embody my love as my hands, feet, voice and heart with each other and in the world. This is your purpose.' This, in effect, is what Jesus is saying to them.

And what about us? Well, we too need a purpose deeper than our fear to experience the peace of Christ. How are you fulfilling the purpose to love Christ has given to you? How may fear be holding you back?

3) Third, the disciples need power within to fulfill such a purpose. Just as Jesus faced opposition, so too will they. They need courage, inspiration and empowerment they don't currently have because of fear. They need the Spirit of Christ or Holy Spirit to enter them. And so we read that Jesus, "breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" Do you ever pray for the Holy Spirit to come into you, to grow in you and to empower you? Where in your life do you need Holy Spirit just now, to flow through you and to overflow out of you into the world around you?

4) Fourth, now that the disciples have some Holy Spirit beginning to flow in and through them, Jesus gives them two of the most challenging ways his purpose being embodied in and through them must be enacted. There is forgiveness they must proclaim, and there is accountability they must demand. The two most powerful ways love is enacted in a world of fear, a world where hate, abuse, indifference and injustice of all kinds especially for those extra vulnerable and powerless happen... In such a world the two most powerful ways love is enacted is through forgiveness and through holding injustice accountable. In Jesus' own words: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Can you imagine what power is given into their hands and ours: that somehow our forgiveness is God's forgiveness of another, and our holding accountable injustice is God's holding accountable the injustice that afflicts both perpetrator and victim. Wow!

How are you called to forgive, to speak truth and to hold accountable yourself and those around you in the name of Christ? How is your forgiveness not a free pass to continue in the wrong, but a call to transformation of relationships toward healing and hoped for reconciliation where possible? How is forgiveness a release and a freedom from hate and bitterness? How is being truthful and holding oneself and others accountable a call not to humiliate or avenge but an act of hope toward reparation, toward healing and toward a new basis for relationships?... How in your life are you being called to forgiveness and accountability?

5) Finally, Jesus returns a week later because Thomas, full of fear, doubt and a grief that's turned bitter, also needs to receive the peace of Christ within. Like the others he, too, must experience that Jesus is alive and real before he, too, can receive everything else. He, too, must hear Jesus speak: Peace be within you, *Eirenee Eimene*... And as he hears the words, touches Jesus and opens his heart to receive this experience in faith, Thomas too will receive his purpose, the empowering Spirit to fulfill it, and the call to forgiveness and accountability...

So what about you and me? Where is fear living in us?... Where are the doors of our hearts locked up?... How may Christ enter in with his peace?... How may we receive the faith that such peace can fill us and breathe through us in ways we have not imagined? ... How may we reclaim our purpose as the hands, feet, voice and heart of Christ in new ways? ... How may the Holy Spirit empower us in ways we have not yet been empowered? ... How may forgiveness and accountability release, embolden and liberate us in ways yet to unfold? ...

I invite you, now, as you are willing, to close your eyes and follow me as we journey together in search of the peace of Christ and an opening of your hearts to receive such peace...

1) You are in a room... a room that is your heart... the doors are locked tight... why?... because you are afraid... Why are you afraid?... How is your fear manifested in ways you relate, ways you hold yourself back and hold yourself in... How is fear manifested in habits you have that isolate you, that don't let others in, that judge them and look down on them as a way of keeping yourself apart?...

2) Jesus appears... somehow he has entered in, even past the locked doors... He speaks:... peace be with you, peace be within you, *eireenee eimeene*.... Touch me... see that I am real... feel that I am real... *Eireenee eimeene*, peace be within you...

3) Now that Jesus has entered the space that is your heart, he asks you: What is your purpose? ... Do you know?... Sure you can think it... It has to be about love above all else, but do you know it deep in your heart?... Do you know clearly and with certainty that you are sent out in love to serve, to give, to be the very hands, feet, voice and heart of Christ for the person next to you who is your neighbour and in the world?...

And how is such a purpose to love as Christ loves applying itself through the uniqueness that is your life...at this time of your life... within your particular circumstances and limitations... within choices you have to make and choices you can make you may be afraid to make?... What are your commitments? What could they be and maybe should be?... What are you afraid of?... What's holding you back?... Peace be within you... *Eireenee eimeene...*

4) You have opened your heart to receive my peace, Jesus says... You have opened your heart to be reminded and challenged to find your purpose to love through me... But I also know you need power to fulfill such a purpose. You need energy and courage... You need faith that enacts what is believed... You need my Spirit... Holy Spirit... Now breathe in and out... and as you breathe in, receive my Spirit... breathe in Holy Spirit...

As you breathe in feel the power, power to fulfill your purpose to love, and to love in the very circumstances, challenges, choices and opportunities yet to unfold as Holy Spirit empowers you... You can do this... you've got this... Peace be within you... *Eireenee eimeene...*

5) But once the door to peace opens a little wider and you step into the world with all its messiness, you are confronted by situations where peace can only come when there is forgiveness, and peace can only come where there is accountability... How may you open a way for the love that is forgiveness to fill your heart and inspire you to forgiveness toward others?... How may you let go and release the grudge, the envy or the resentment in peace?...

And how may you speak truth and defend it?... How may you call out injustice and stand up to it?... even as fear can easily overwhelm your best intentions?... How may Holy Spirit empower you to represent Christ in the world even as you feel weak, uncertain and afraid of what may come from those around you?... Peace be within you, *eireenee eimeene...*

Maybe you're like Thomas... too many doubts... doubting has become a habit... it's familiar and comfortable... trusting is risky... disappointment, betrayal, humiliation, you've been there... but never again!... Now, Jesus asks you... let it go... open up a little further... Take a step and touch me – the One who has entered your space and is within you... See that I am real... Feel me... My Spirit is real and within you... It is flowing... Let it flow... Let it overflow... Let peace have a chance... Let peace rise up in you... Peace be within you... *Eireenee eimeene... Amen.*