

Sermon - Easter II, Year B

4/7/24

The Peace of Christ/Resurrection

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A friend and colleague of mine is a priest in New Jersey, and he spent his Easter Sunday this year in the emergency room with his four-year-old daughter who is suffering from brain cancer. Something seemed wrong with the little girl early in the morning, and so they all went to the hospital – my friend, his wife, the little girl, and her seven-year-old brother. After a few hours in the waiting room, my friend sent his wife and their son along to the Easter egg hunt that the little boy had been looking forward to for weeks. He remained, waiting. And he was angry. When I asked him about how he was doing in that waiting room, he didn't mince words. He was angry that he could not be with his congregation on his favorite day of the year. He was full of sadness that he couldn't take his son to the Easter egg hunt. His heart was breaking for his wife who has borne so much of the burdens of their life these days. And he was afraid – so afraid for his little girl who was so young, so innocent, and in the midst of a crisis even adults aren't prepared to navigate.

But when I asked my friend and colleague about his Easter, he also shared something else. Hours after the family had arrived in the waiting room, his little girl was propped up on a cushy, child-sized chair, hooked up to an IV. There was another girl there, just a few years older, propped up in a similar chair nearby. The second child had a Nintendo Switch, and the two began to play together. The older girl gave the game to my friend's little girl, and helped her (mostly pretend) to play the game. In the midst of the worst place in the world where a parent could spend Easter Sunday, my friend heard something that felt impossible: laughter. The two girls,

both in the midst of the worst place in the world where a little child could spend Easter Sunday, were laughing together.

My friend reported that it was the closest thing to Resurrection that he had ever seen.

It is still Easter when we meet the disciples in today's Gospel from St. John. Jesus has risen from the dead, but the world of those who love him is still marked by fear and uncertainty. Even those who have seen Jesus since his marvelous exit from the garden tomb are not quite sure what will happen next. The Gospels tell us that the disciples had hidden in an upper room of a house whose doors were locked in fear of those who would persecute them. When a criminal was executed at the behest of the Roman Empire, it was quite common indeed for all of that criminal's associates to be executed too. The disciples are not wrong to believe that they could be next in the prisons and on the crosses of the mob who had so recently taken the life of their teacher. The Resurrection *has* taken place. But they are still locked away in fear.

But then something extraordinary happens: "When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, **Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."** The doors are locked, the fear is real, the danger is still quite present, and *Jesus comes among them saying, "peace be with you."*

If there is ever a portion of the Gospel that speaks to the heart of the human condition, this one is it. This is the story of all creation that finds itself hovering somewhere between the glory of the Resurrection and the glory of Jesus' coming again. The Resurrection *has happened* - even if we, like Thomas, sometimes struggle to believe. Jesus has come out of the tomb, defeating the powers of sin and death forever, insisting upon the restored and holy destiny of all

creation forever. All of the beauty and all of the hope are real and good. And yet most of us know what it is to find ourselves in the locked upper room.

The world is still a place of fear. We still live amidst the realities of violence and brutality. There is still pain, there are still enemies. We still find ourselves in the emergency room on the morning of Easter Sunday. But the Bible is clear: Jesus finds us anyway, and when he does, he is speaking of peace.

Notice the liberating bit of news here: the disciples had not gone on a coordinated manhunt for Jesus. They hadn't put on their best clothes or insisted upon their best behavior. They did not pretend to be happy when they were still brokenhearted and not sure what to believe. They did not pretend to be certain where there was doubt. They didn't clean the kitchen or decorate the upper room. They didn't follow a devotional program or attend fifty church services in fifty days. They simply *were*, precisely as themselves, and Jesus came to them.

The power and perfection of the Resurrection is something that we will not fully understand until we meet Jesus face to face on a very glorious day indeed. But in the meantime, the power of the Resurrection means for us – here and now, today and always – that Jesus always finds us. He seeks us out and welcomes us in. He comes through the locked doors, and the hidden rooms, and the most fearful places in our society, our hearts, and our lives. He will find us outside the tomb in the garden. He will find us in the Eucharist. He will find us in the emergency room, in the laughter of children who help each other play a game.

The power of the Resurrection brings the hope of Christ to all of us. I pray that we all might try our best to see him and welcome him, but the reality is that he will come to us *anyway*, with open hands and bearing peace.

Amen.