

2nd Sunday of Easter
Service of Daily Prayer -- Morning
April 11, 2021

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

P: O Lord, open my lips,

C: **and my mouth will declare Your praise.**

Psalm 51:15

P: Make haste, O God, to deliver me;

C: **Make haste to help me, O Lord.**

Psalm 70:1

P: Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;

C: **for His steadfast love endures forever!**

Psalm 118:29

**All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Scripture Readings

Acts 4:32-35

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

1 John 1:1-2:2

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

John 20:19-31

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When

he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Hymn: LSB 471, *O Sons and Daughters of the King* (v. 1-4, 9)

Refrain



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!



1 O sons and daugh - ters of the King,
 2 That Eas - ter morn, at break of day,
 3 An an - gel clad in white they see,



Whom heav'n - ly hosts in glo - ry sing, To - day the
 The faith - ful wom - en went their way To seek the
 Who sits and speaks un - to the three, "Your Lord will

The Refrain is repeated after st. 9.



grave has lost its sting! Al - le - lu - ia!
 tomb where Je - sus lay. Al - le - lu - ia!
 go to Gal - i - lee." Al - le - lu - ia!

4 That night the apostles met in fear;
 Among them came their master dear
 And said, "My peace be with you here."
 Alleluia!

- 9 On this most holy day of days
Be laud and jubilee and praise:
To God your hearts and voices raise.
Alleluia! Refrain

Sermon

I know you've heard of the book "War and Peace," although probably few of us have actually read "War and Peace" - it's a totally massive book, well over a thousand pages long. But the title sums up how we tend to see those two words as opposites: war and peace. The opposite of peace is war; and vice-versa, peace is basically the absence of conflict. Peace is what you get when conflict and fighting stop. If you look up the word in the dictionary, most of the definitions are like that: peace is freedom from conflict or disturbance or noise, a lack of hostilities.

It's what we would call a negative definition: we define it by what is not happening or what is absent. But this is a quirk of the English language and the way we use the word, and unfortunately it can affect the way we read today's passage from John's Gospel and the words that Jesus spoke to the disciples there. Because "peace" is pretty important. Three times in this short section, Jesus tells his followers, "Peace be with you." That's one way you can tell that something is really important in the Bible, by repetition, and especially when it's repeated three times like that. And so, three times, Jesus says "Peace be with you."

In the way that the Hebrew language and the Jewish people use the word, it means so much more than simply "we're not currently fighting." It's a wonderfully rich word, worth diving into a little more deeply to appreciate this three-fold blessing of peace from Jesus. On the surface, it's not a surprising thing to say: "peace" in Hebrew is shalom, commonly used as a greeting or a goodbye. To greet someone in Hebrew, saying shalom is just like saying "Hey there, good to see you!" So Jesus shows up and he says, "Hey, guys!" If it were only said once, I don't think we could read too much into it. It'd be a normal greeting, nothing more. But three times... Three times gets our attention. It's like using a highlighter to say "pay extra attention here."

So how does the Bible use the word shalom, then? In a lot of ways. It can mean safety and security: a home that is guarded and protected from robbers and loss is one that is in shalom. Jesus tells these fearful disciples to be at peace; they are safe there with him. It can mean personal welfare and health: to ask about someone's shalom is like asking "How are you doing? Are you okay?" Wishing someone shalom is not just a greeting; it's a blessing, a wish for their health and wellness, and that fits with Jesus' words as well.

Shalom is also friendship, and this is important particularly in John's Gospel. During the course of the Last Supper, Jesus said to the disciples gathered around him, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." Jesus points us to the astounding fact of the Gospel that comes through faith, that we are at peace with God. It's not just that we are no longer fighting against Him, no longer in rebellion against the true King of the universe; it is that we have this deeper peace, this friendship and affection. Peace with God through Jesus doesn't only mean an end to conflict; it means we are part of the family.

And finally, maybe most importantly, shalom is all about wholeness and things being right. In the Old Testament law, time after time, it's used to talk about "making good" on a debt or "paying restitution" after a loss or a theft, to make amends. It's hard to separate shalom, peace, from what we mean when we talk about "justification" or being made righteous. It says in Romans that Christ was given into death for our sins, and raised to life for our justification, for being made righteous, right with God, to be put into shalom with God.

Something that is whole and complete and in perfect harmony is in a state of shalom. I think this gets to the very heart of what it means to “be saved.” American Christianity really likes to talk about the innocent/guilty aspect of the cross, the guilty sinners being forgiven and becoming innocent in God’s eyes. But there is so much more to it, because this salvation from Christ and through Christ is defined by peace, by shalom: restored to a state of harmony with God, restored to a state of wholeness when sin had spiritually damaged us.

The whole universe, all of God’s creation, is a part of this; when it’s all tied together in harmony: God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets truly call shalom. We call it peace but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be. It is an echo of Eden.

This brings us back to this passage from John, with the fearful disciples and the doubting Thomas. What, then, is the real opposite of peace? Not war, but fear and doubt. Be at peace: don’t be afraid. Be at peace: don’t doubt, but believe. Just hearing about the resurrection did not change much for the disciples. They’d heard about Mary’s encounter with Jesus in the garden. They learned about his visit from those two on the road to Emmaus. They’d heard Peter and John talk about finding the tomb empty.

But there they were, late that evening, still hiding behind locked doors out of fear. It’s understandable; fear is a powerful force, and they had just witnessed their master dying at the hands of an angry mob whipped up by the rich and powerful elite. Peter had already found it would not be easy to lay low and slip away, as he tried to deny Jesus three times but kept getting recognized. They had plenty of rational reasons to be afraid, and just hearing these tantalizing hints about empty tombs and post-mortem appearances wasn’t enough to outweigh it.

What truly changes that is the presence of Jesus. Not just hearing about him, but having an actual encounter. And Jesus sets the tone immediately: “Peace be with you.” No recriminations or rebukes for their fear or faithless conduct while he went to the cross. No stern judgment, no disappointment, no anger. Just peace. Shalom, my friends. It’s such a wonderful picture for us of the grace we receive, because it’s the way Jesus comes to us too. When we’re afraid, doubting, uneasy because of our own sins against him, unwilling to face God... Shalom, my friends. Peace be with you. Then, only then, does it say the disciples are glad when they saw the Lord.

You can’t talk people out of fear. You can’t just simply tell them to not be afraid, or explain rationally why their fear doesn’t make sense. Our brains physically don’t work like that. I know that too well from personal experience. Just because the disciples were told about the resurrection, information alone can’t short-circuit that fear response. Possibly some of you have a lot of fear and anxiety; even before coronavirus, anxiety was pretty common among Americans, and even from that already-high level it’s been off the charts since 2020. Uncertainty about the future is a big reason; fear of letting others down, or fear from repercussions from past mistakes are also causes.

The antidote to fear and doubt is the peace of Jesus. I can’t talk you into it in a sermon; I can’t persuade or convince you. That’s not how our minds work. That’s not how our souls work. All I can do is point you back to Jesus, the source of peace, and pray that the Holy Spirit does his work. But we can know that from what Scripture shows us, that it is the presence of Christ that creates rejoicing, the peace Jesus brought to his fearful and doubting disciples that night behind locked doors. This is shalom as things are meant to be, grounded in the resurrection of the Son of God. The shalom of the resurrection comes from the joy of genuine forgiveness, the delight of abundant and eternal life, the thrill of salvation. It comes in the promise of Jesus’ return to reconcile, to restore, to revive.

And he is with us. Not physically and visibly like he stood in the room with them that night, though I think that's something all Christians yearn for. He is with us here: John also tells us in this passage the reason why he's writing this all down, "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." The promise of Christ and the presence of Christ are inherently and closely connected: we know we have his promise, and so we also have his presence. Christ coming to us in the Word is not just the historical figure, but the present Lord; by the Word Jesus himself is walking here in our midst. And it is the presence and promise of Jesus, our risen and living King, that brings true shalom.

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

C: Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

P: Almighty God, grant that we who have celebrated the Lord's resurrection may by Your grace confess in our life and conversation that Jesus is Lord and God; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

All: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

P: Let us bless the Lord!

C: Thanks be to God!

P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C: Amen.