

Sermon - Easter 3, Year B
The Peace of Christ
4/14/24

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

Today in the calendar of the church year, we find ourselves gathered on the third Sunday of Easter. It is appropriate that our Gospel reading from Luke today is taking place on that very first Easter afternoon. As we might imagine, it is an eventful day. Mary Magdalene and the other women brought spices to the tomb, only to find the stone rolled away and the body of Jesus missing. The angels question them: “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He is Risen!” When Jesus appears among the disciples just a small while later, Thomas is not among them: “Unless I see his wounds and place my hands in them, I will not believe.” Jesus honors this with love, and Thomas confesses with amazement: “My Lord and my God.”

Two other disciples soon find themselves in a similar state of bewilderment as they meet a stranger along the road to Emmaus. They ask him: “Are you the only one in Jerusalem who does not know what has taken place?” The stranger opens the scriptures for them, and as the day wanes, they break bread together, and suddenly it is clear to the disciples that it is none other than Jesus himself.

It is the day of Resurrection. Jesus is alive again and greeting the disciples, the women and the men, assuring them that the heartbreak of the previous three days has all been swallowed up in the fulfillment of God’s promise. In the busyness of this first Easter day, it can be easy to forget that just hours earlier, most of the people whom Jesus is greeting are the very same who abandoned him at the Cross. These are the very same people who abandoned him in the garden of Gethsemane. Who denied him outright on the day of his crucifixion. Who fled from the hill at Calvary and hid themselves in fear in the depth of an anonymous upper room.

Everything about the actions of most of the disciples over the recent days would suggest that Jesus wouldn’t be out of line to question them, perhaps even to be angry. Jesus, after all,

does get angry for righteous reasons in the Bible. He could have said, “why did you abandon me? How could you not have trusted me? What were you thinking?” And yet...we see in the Gospels, more than once, that when Jesus meets his disciples on that afternoon of Resurrection, he says one extraordinary thing: “Peace be with you.”

In last week’s sermon, I spoke about Jesus coming through the walls of the locked upper room, bringing peace even to the places where the disciples were determined to shut all things out. I spoke about how the peace of Christ searches us out – how he finds us – even when we are determined to lock the doors and the windows of our own hearts. The peace of Christ recognizes no barrier nor limit. He finds us on the road, and he finds us in the dark.

Today, Jesus greets the disciples yet again: “Peace be with you.” Into the midst of fear and uncertainty, the very first thing that Jesus does is offer them peace. We use these words together too. “The peace of the Lord be always with you.” “May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God.” “May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed rest in peace.” But what is this “peace” of Jesus? What does it really mean? What are we offering to one another, Sunday by Sunday, and what are we receiving from the heart of Christ?

The scriptures often offer us a slightly differing vision of reality than the rest of secular society. A good example is the idea of “joy.” In the wider world, “joy” is often aligned closely with happiness. Something good happens, so we experience joy. And yet the Bible is clear that joy is an all together broader, more powerful thing. Joy can exist in the midst of hardship and even despair. Happiness fades when the good moment disappears. But joy endures.

The peace of Christ works in a similar way. In the wider world, we might think of peace as the absence of war. In our own lives, we might think of peace as the absence of anxiety. In fact, it is generally easier, on secular terms, to think of peace as the absence of something: a time

of no distress, no conflict, no disturbance. Peace as the absence of disruptive or violent things. This is the peace that the world can sometimes give.

In the *Book of Common Prayer*, one of the final prayers at the service of Evening Prayer is the Collect for Peace which reads: “O GOD, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed: Give unto thy servants that peace, which the world cannot give;” This peace is all together something different.

The peace of Jesus Christ is not a peace of absence, but instead a peace that is ultimately defined by presence. It is defined by the presence of God. The peace of Christ comes from outside of us – it is not dependent on our own bodies. It is okay if we have anxious hearts or racing minds. This peace comes from Jesus.

The peace of Christ comes from outside of current events – it is not dependent on world leaders or national events. It can flourish even when those people or events break our hearts. This peace comes from Jesus, even into those locked rooms of conflict and distress.

The peace of Christ is what we experience when we remember three truths that Julian of Norwich wrote beautifully about in the 14th century: that God made the world, God sustains the world, and God loves the world. God made us, God keeps us, and God loves us.

Even as the disciples gathered anxiously on that first Easter afternoon, Jesus assures them: The Father made you. I will always keep you. I love you.

And so this peace of Christ comes into our own hearts. Even if we are suffering, or ill, or just tired and fed up, Jesus assures us: The Father made you. I will always keep you. I love you.”

The peace of Jesus does not depend on us. It does not depend on the state of the world. It is a gift, offered continually by our savior and friend, who made us, and keeps us, and loves us – beyond the end of the age. Amen.