

John 20:19-31
April 11, 2021

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Peace be with you.

“Peace be with you” is the first thing Jesus says to his disciples who have locked themselves up and away in fear.

Peace be with you.

He didn't ask – Why did you abandon me?

He didn't ask – Where were you while I died on the cross?

He didn't ask – Why didn't you come to my tomb?

He didn't say – You're in a whole lot of trouble!

No – the first thing Jesus says to his locked up disciples is – Peace be with you.

Peace.

That's the most important thing we need to know today. We may abandon God, but God will never, ever, abandon us.

In fact, God will barge through the doors we have locked and come to us with peace so that all fear can be destroyed.

Peace be with you. There is nothing to fear.

So, as the days continue after that first encounter with the risen Christ, the disciples stop locking the door. They no longer live in fear. And, they now expect Jesus to come to them in peace whenever they gather.

Two thousand years later, every time we gather as followers of Christ, even on zoom, Jesus does show up with us and he gives us his peace.

Again Jesus is breaking down all barriers that would separate us from God.

Peace be with you.

“Peace be with you” destroys all walls and opens all door.

Because God is full of grace, mercy, and unending love, nothing can destroy our relationship with God. Nothing can keep God away from us. Not abandonment. Not fear. Not even death.

God will never leave us, and in community we share that good news.

Peace be with you.

Now. While he was alone, Thomas did not have an encounter with the risen Christ, and he was upset, understandably so.

Thomas was the one who encouraged everyone to go with Jesus to die in Jerusalem. But, he was among those who deserted Jesus when he got arrested. And, he was the only one not to see Jesus on the first day of the resurrection.

We can speculate a lot about why Thomas wasn't there with the community. Grief? Anger? Shame? Guilt? A long shopping list? Fish to catch?

We don't know. More than likely we will project ourselves onto him and decide where he was and what he was doing based on how we see ourselves in the story.

The key thing though is that he wasn't there. He wasn't with the community, and because of that, he didn't see the freshly resurrected Christ. So, he had a hard time believing what they were saying. He wanted proof. He wanted what they had received.

And so, Jesus comes to him in the midst of the community. Jesus walks right up to him and gives him the opportunity to touch his wounds. To do the very things he had demanded earlier.

Whether or not Thomas actually touches his wounds we do not know, but Jesus comes directly to him. That's when Thomas' eyes are opened and he proclaims – My Lord and my God.

My Lord and my God.

It's not a Lord and a God, or the Lord and the God, but my Lord and my God. God is our God, and our God comes directly to us bringing peace.

He breaks through all barriers to bring us his peace.

Peace be with you, and that is the good news we share in the world.

It is we who take the good news of peace that we have received from God out into the world, so that those who have not seen the resurrected Lord will come to believe as they experience him through us.

As we share our faith in words and actions, others will experience Christ and know God's peace, and the good news of hope will be planted within them. As Paul says, faith comes through hearing. So, who we say Jesus is matters in the world.

Aside from Thomas, who was not there, all of the other disciples received the Holy Spirit as Jesus breathed on them. But, in his confession of faith, we know that Thomas has also received the Holy Spirit.

“My Lord and my God” is a confession that can only come through the Holy Spirit, and that is a big part of the Easter celebration as we remember our baptisms, the place where we are guaranteed the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is the place where God claims us as God's own enabling us to say “my” Lord and “my” God. It is the place where we are adopted into God's family. It's relational.

Peace be with you. My Lord and my God.

They are simultaneously singular and plural.

Faith is personal, but never private. It takes a community.

On Friday, we remembered Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In one of his letters from prison, where he was locked up by the Nazis in a concentration camp for his resistance to them, he wrote – “The church is church only when it is there for others... not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell people in every calling what a life with Christ is, what it means to be there for others.”

It's all about community.

God is a community – Father, Son, Holy Spirit – and so we can only testify to God in community – a forgiven community of grace who has received God's peace directly.

So, as Christ's followers, we take his message of peace out into the world together.

Peace be with you. Be at peace. God is with you and will never leave you.

As a community, we testify to that by how we treat each other and by how we speak to one another. With God's peace, we share God's peace. Our words and actions are our proclamations of who God is.

No one is outside of God's love. God doesn't give up on anyone. And God, in Christ, breaks through all barriers in order to give us peace.

So during Easter, as a community, that's what we celebrate. As a community, that's the good news we share in the world.

The first 12 disciples of Jesus were a very diverse lot. Yes, 4 of them were fishermen, but there was also a tax collector, a revolutionary, and a bunch of others of whose occupation we're not sure.

It takes a community of diverse people to proclaim God's peace. It cannot be done single handedly. It takes all of us together. It's relational. And, in baptism, we are united as one in Christ, into his death and resurrection, a resurrection that has ultimately destroyed all barriers between us and God, and us and others.

And just as Jesus was marked by the wounds of the crucifixion, so it takes us with all of our wounds to share God's peace, to share God's love. To proclaim that God's love is stronger than our wounds.

God takes all of our wounds on himself and resurrects them into a new life of peace with God and one another.

There is absolutely nothing stronger than God's unending love for us. It's so strong that it even breaks the barrier of death.

You think a locked door will keep Jesus out? You think guilt or shame will keep Jesus away? You think fear is stronger than God?

Please. He took down the stone that sealed his tomb. Come on!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Amen!