

Scripture and Sermon for Sunday, April 23, 2017

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know- this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.' "Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.' This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to

God.

John 20:19-31

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." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 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 retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, 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 the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, 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. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt 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 come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in

the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Let us pray...Amen.

The stories we have in scripture tell us that Jesus wasn't the kind of Messiah the people expected. His triumphant entry into Jerusalem ended with the crowds shouting 'crucify him'! He went from being the savior to being the sacrifice, and all the while, he did not try and stop the proceedings, even though he could.

So we shouldn't be surprised when we read about his first appearance to the disciples in John's gospel, his first appearance to those who betrayed him and denied him. The first words out of his mouth are, 'Peace be with you'. And not once, but twice!

Peace Be With You, to the ones who could not stay awake one hour in his time of trial, Peace Be With You to the ones who claimed to not know him after sharing a very special meal together. Peace Be With You to the ones who participated in bringing about his end on earth. Peace Be With You so that the ones who might feel the worst about his crucifixion would be put at ease in his presence, so that they might know that he won't be nursing a grudge.

In his resurrection, Jesus is transformed in his triumph over evil and death, but the first sign that he still isn't what we would

expect is when he doesn't once criticize the disciples for their failures, he simply offers them Peace.

What a gift. What an amazing template for our own human interactions here on earth. What if *we* used 'Peace Be With You' when speaking to those who have betrayed us? What if that was what we said to someone who has denied us? What if a heartfelt expression of Peace is our only response to another's anger, or pain, or willful attempt at hurting us?

I believe the world would be a different place if our first and best response to conflict was an expression of peace. The world would be a very different place if our first and best response to threats of violence were expressions of peace.

If Jesus were any less divine, he certainly would have had a legitimate argument with the disciples. But because of his strength, because of his faith, because of his ability to not take the disciples' failures personally, Jesus is able to wish them peace with integrity and with meaning.

We, too, have access to that kind of strength. We, too, can wish those who have done us harm peace, and with meaning and integrity as well. But it takes work, doesn't it? It doesn't come naturally to us, those of us who have had our feelings hurt, or had our reputations smeared.

Jesus used an expression of Peace to signify not only his forgiveness of the disciples for their failures around his crucifixion, but for their future failures as children of God. Jesus is offering Peace to his closest friends knowing they will continue to fail in their faith endeavors, as humans are wont to do.

And this gives me great hope: because Jesus wishes *us* peace too! Jesus wants Peace to be with us, too! In spite of our own role in his crucifixion, our own role in betraying him, in denying him.

No, we weren't physically there when they crucified our Lord, but yes we *are* there every time we act in a way that diminishes love and peace in the world. We each have our own stuff to deal with when it comes to betraying and denying Jesus, and *he still wishes that Peace be with us anyway!*

This is the good news for today: that Jesus wishes that Peace will be with us, in spite of our faults and flaws, and that we can wish that Peace will be with others in spite of their faults and flaws, even if those faults and flaws have led them to cause us harm or pain!

There is plenty of room for Peace in the Kingdom of Heaven, and no room for violence, no room for hate, no room for grudges. When we hold violence and hate and grudges in our hearts, there is no room for peace. So Jesus shows us the way by modeling for us how to do it. He offers Peace to the disciples who believe, and he offers Peace to the disciple who must put his finger in the holes in his hand in order to believe.

Not an easy path to follow, is it? Imagine for a moment, the person that has hurt you the most. Could be emotionally, could be physically. Now imagine yourself wishing them Peace, from the bottom of your heart. Darn near impossible, right? Too much pain, too many complications.

But if we start by wishing those close to us Peace, if we move to wishing those less close to us Peace, and if we attempt every once

in a while to wish those who have harmed us Peace, I think it can be done. We can learn to follow Jesus on that particular path.

My challenge for us today, is that we begin finding ways to sow seeds of Peace in and around the people in our lives. Perhaps each of us could find once person to speak to, one person in need of some Peace. Maybe we could look them in the eye and say, Peace Be With You, and really mean it. It will be easier if we offer that Peace to someone close to us, it will be harder to offer it to someone we don't know well, it will be hardest to offer Peace to someone who doesn't like us, or who has hurt us.

The gift in taking that path is that we, too, will have Peace with us when we wish Peace for others.

Now, in this day and age of germ transmission and immune deficiency, people are cautious when shaking hands or touching others. In whatever way makes you the most comfortable, I would like us to take the next few moments and wish Peace upon each other, just like Jesus did. Turn to a neighbor beside, in front, or behind you, and say, Peace be with you, and allow them to say, 'and also with you'. We don't need to travel out of our pews or seats, but it's ok to stand if you are able to offer Peace to a neighbor.

Jesus offers us Peace, in spite of our shortcomings. We, too, can offer Peace to those around us, in spite of their shortcomings, and our own faults as well. This is the miracle of the Christ's resurrection, the triumph over evil, over pain, and even over death.

The Christian path is not an easy one, but it begins when we can wish Peace to our sisters and brothers on the same path, and it goes further when we can wish Peace to those *not* on the same path, maybe even to those who would do us harm.

Peace *is* with us, right now, right here. Now let's go out there and share it. Amen.