



Peace Be With You

First Sunday of Easter
24 April 2022

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Well my friends, we have survived. Easter was glorious! People were overwhelmed with the sounds of praise on Easter. And I was thrilled that the asbestos abatement was finished in time for us to walk from one end of our building to the other without having to go through Pastor Tony's office and then the main office and then my office just to visit the bathrooms. Sometimes it is the little things.

And that is all the disciples need at this moment. They need a little thing called...peace. John tells us that the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews. I wonder who is more afraid in this moment. The disciples, because they fear that the religious leaders will come to arrest them – just as they arrested Jesus or the religious leaders for their fear that this man called Jesus was actually the Messiah, the Son of God, and did actually do exactly what he said he would do – rise from the dead. Who is more afraid in this moment? And who is more in need of peace. Well the answer is both but lucky for the disciples – Jesus chooses them this day.

I would expect the disciples are exhausted – from the first shouts of the women who visited the empty tomb and then went to tell the disciples to Mary Magdalene who sees Jesus and hears Jesus call her name. To Peter and John who ran to the empty tomb because they needed to see the emptiness for themselves. As the disciples are gathered behind locked doors today – what can they possibly be thinking? Is it true? Did it really happen? He did die on a cross, right? John – you were there – you saw him die. According to the stories of Jesus' burial none of the eleven disciples who followed Jesus were present when he was buried. Only Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are named as present when Jesus is buried. And since we do not know exactly who is 'included' with the disciples in the locked house – we can only guess at who was able to tell the stories of what had taken place between the burial on Good Friday and the resurrection on Easter morning.

Why should we expect the chaos to be any different for the disciples when they gathered together in both fear and confusion at the rumors that had spread on the wind. A curtain torn in two on Good Friday. An earthquake. Darkness. Then a stone rolled away. An empty tomb. Grave clothes left behind. Angels. And yet, even with the words of the women – there is too much that does not make sense.

It is no different for any of us when we hear the sudden news of the death of someone we love. Phone calls are made. Hastily we dress and make our way to hospital or home and greet those who arrived before us. There are tears, hugs, questions – so many questions and so few



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answers in those first precious hours when we ask the questions to distract us from the pain that we know is about to engulf us.

We know all about rumors here at Ascension. It has been most apparent with the remodel of the area in the lobby between the main office and the women's bathroom and the 1993 addition of lobby and sanctuary and the 19 something addition between wood post and hearth room. At first it frustrated me to no end. Everyone who has been around since 1975 had a different answer. And honestly – there are a lot of you still around since 1975. Which is wonderful and, truth be told, each person remembered some part with clarity. However, there were also several fuzzy memories -- and I know 43 years ago is VERY long time ago. So first, we figured out who was a member in 1975 and then we began to ask them. And after the fourth person gave their rememberings and opinions – and not one of them matched – well then it became funny. Mainly because we were going to have to test for asbestos regardless of what everyone thought they remembered about the location of the second entrance when the building was expanded in 1979 or 1983 or whenever it happened and whether or not there was tile under the carpet and finally because there was no way we were leaving the tired brown carpet in one part of the lobby while everything else was renewed with beautiful gray vinyl plank. Not as long as there is breath in this body anyways. And so I can easily imagine what exhausted, frustrated, emotional, probably hungry disciples were feeling in the rumors and confusion of this moment when no one had any answers that were credible enough for all to confidently believe.

And then this: Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you!” I do find it amusing that Jesus needs to share the peace with them twice. Perhaps they were too excited to hear him the first time. Maybe they were too in shock at his resurrected appearance. And it is possible, I imagine, that Jesus used those words to somehow bring the disciples back to reality – that there was indeed work that needed to be done with his resurrection from the dead. It may be the reason that he gives the disciples the keys to the kingdom of God immediately after he shares the peace the second time. If we keep reading, “²² When Jesus had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

It is too much. As in most situations when we are overwhelmed – less is more Jesus, less is more. But then again, Jesus is on a timeline. In this life we live, we may be more fortunate than Jesus to not have to worry about 50 days of Easter and then an ascension into heaven to sit



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at the right hand of the Father. And I, for one, am really okay without the knowledge of the timeline of my life from my baptism until my last breath.

Yet, here is what I will tell you this day. After Jesus meets Mary in the garden, he finds his friends – the ones who have been with him through thick and thin. He finds the disciples, his followers, and shares a word of peace with them. We know that Thomas asks for proof that Jesus truly is alive, but for the ten disciples gathered behind locked doors the presence of Jesus and the offer of peace is what Jesus knows they need even as they might believe otherwise. It is a reminder for me that Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves.

For all the things we have given up in the time of pandemic – what I miss the most and still miss is the gift of touch. Oh, I know, if you come to my aisle at the end of worship – good luck getting by me without handshake or hug. Hey there are two other lines if you want to make your way out of the sanctuary without greeting Pastor Chris. Yet, what I miss even more is the ritual of sharing the peace during worship.

A member of the church who still sits three rows from the back always questioned why I felt the need for everyone to greet each other at the beginning of worship and then greet each other again during the sharing of the peace. I told him – at the beginning of worship – you should share your name and a “good morning.” During the sharing of the peace – you should actually share the peace and not where you went for dinner last night. I am not sure I have convinced him of the difference. I will keep working on him. Regardless, what I have missed is the genuine moment of sharing the peace with other believers. In the world in which we live – peace is often more elusive than we like to admit. And when that example has been displaced from our rituals in worship each week – well, there are times that peace feels even more elusive. And Pastor Tony and other staff members will tell me – we can wave – we can flash a peace sign - we can head nod – we can smile and say peace be with you without touching. It is true – but it is not the same. Sorry – the act of sharing the peace with someone is about being fully present to that other person. The gift of a handshake or hug or a kiss (usually that’s with my wife – we got enough rumors about flooring) and the sharing of a name if I do not know someone can be an incredibly intimate and meaningful act. One I do not take lightly. It is the reason that even when I sit in my office with someone who is angry with me or who disagrees with me about some theological point to the level of needing to find a new church – I still offer them my hand to shake and the words “peace be with you.” When I leave someone after a visit in home or hospital or at the cemetery – those same words are said, “peace be with you.” In so many times and places those are the exact words we need to hear and are often the most foreign words anyone expects to hear in daily conversation. Even when our Spanish speaking sisters



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and brothers began to worship at 8:30 and could not understand much of the service, we taught the words “la paz” – peace – so that we could at least share the peace during worship. I expect we will return to the sharing of the peace when I return from sabbatical – should God allow this pandemic and our fear to continue to recede from our world. I, at least, remain hopeful.

The sharing of the peace, to me, encourages me to remember that Jesus is present among us. It is why, I believe, Jesus offered the words “peace be with you” to the disciples when he appeared to them and not the word “surprise!” Although I imagine SURPRISE would have had an even greater effect. So, this day, my friends, “peace be with you.” And if you like surprise better...Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.