

Really Needing Peace

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

April 11, 2021

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Peace be with you. Shalom. I'm not going to bore you by elaborating on the range of meaning of peace; most of you have heard that sermon somewhere. "Peace" for Jesus in John's Gospel, and the word is used across much of the Bible, means wholeness, wellness, health, justice. The root of the Greek word in today's passage has as its root the verb "to join" – it is about connectedness.¹

Connectedness, peace, wholeness right now? Maybe there is no better story to help us understand where we are, right now - spiritually, emotionally, physically.

Jesus makes two post crucifixion visits to the room where the disciples are cowering. Remember that Mary has already brought them good news, but they seem not to have quite believed it, I guess, not until he showed them his wounds. Not until Jesus showed Thomas the nail marks, let him touch them, did Thomas believe. Easter morning, Mary didn't recognize her Lord in the garden, until she heard his voice.

The word peace, is just a greeting, in ancient Jewish culture. In Israel I still get greeted with a "shalom". It is probably more a hello than a wish that for me that I might be well and healthy.

I wonder: what lies at the heart of that moment for Thomas, Mary, the disciples as they watched Jesus endure death on a cross? How hopeless, heartbroken, they must have felt, and how unlikely it felt to them that any peace would find them. Scholar David Lose wonders, why wasn't Thomas with the disciples when Jesus made his first appearance in that locked room? Lose muses if perhaps Thomas, the quintessential realist, was out piecing his life back together after the trauma he witnessed.² Maybe he was doing the best to get his life back together.

We all cope differently with loneliness, sadness, isolation. It seems like the Good News in this story from John's Gospel is that Jesus meets us where we are – whether we are in denial or addressing the challenge head on.

Anne Lamott suggests that the opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. "Faith," she adds, "includes noticing the mess, the emptiness and discomfort, and letting it be there until some light returns."³ The Peace that Jesus brings is not a magic vaccine to cast out fear and grief. God's Peace encourages us, gives us hope enough to keep on keeping on. I think we could all use a little of that peace.

That Greek word for "peace" appears in another well-used passage from the Gospel of John, used in times when we celebrate a life of someone who lived well and died. Jesus is preparing his friends for his imminent death and says:

¹ Concordance reference, Greek word "eiréné" "eirénē (from eirō, "to join, tie together into a whole") – properly, wholeness, i.e. when all essential parts are joined together; peace (God's gift of wholeness)"

<https://biblehub.com/greek/1515.htm>

² "The new 'Normal'" from David Lose blog ...*In the Meantime*, Easter 2 A

³ Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith. © 2005 Anne Lamott. Penguin Group.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.⁴

The Peace of Christ is not the kind of peace that the world offers. What kind of peace does the world offer? Sometimes a glib peace, a quick short-sighted solution, or the “Don’t ask any questions, and hopefully it will go away” kind. Or has anyone witnessed the *Pax Romana* kind of peace, enforced by the powerful? Conflict resolution imposed by the threat of violence, when really, that conflict is messy. Deeper, long-lasting resolution often only comes from sitting down and talking, listening, being patient, and seeking what is fair. Muddling, struggling, having to learn patience and kindness, but also speaking truth in love and courage. Not a magic pill, but courage, and acknowledging doubt.

Jesus, crucified and alive again, meets Thomas where he is. Jesus met Mary and those disciples who didn’t get it the first time. I often don’t get it the first time, I muddle. I’m really needing that kind of peace that Christ offers. How about you?

⁴ John chapter 14, verse 27