

**THE THIRD
SUNDAY OF
EASTER**

**The Rev.
Stephanie
E. Parker**

Luke 24:36-38 2012

Let There be Peace

If asked we might define peace in a variety of ways. We can define it as the lack of conflict or aggression, as we might define world peace. We could define peace as security—the security to be able to walk the streets safely at night. Or we might describe peace as a feeling of satisfaction or contentment in our personal lives.

Regardless of how we define, envision or describe it---what we seem to want most is peace, but it seems to elude us an awful lot of the time—we still live with restlessness and fear, we still live with anxiety and worry.

So apparently do the disciples.

Even as they hear about Jesus' resurrection appearance from those who traveled with him on the road to Emmaus, Jesus appears to them. Their response is one of terror and disbelief. It would, after all, take a little getting used to—they did see this man crucified and dead and buried, and yet, here he is again, in flesh as real as their own, with wounds as well.

Certainly their fearful joy is born of trying to reconcile two irreconcilable facts—that Jesus was dead and that he is alive! Have you ever been afraid or doubtful that something was just too wonderful to trust and believe? I have to think this was just such a moment in the life of these disciples.^[1]

But, Jesus appears to them because he needs them. He needs them and he needs us. He needs us to know that his very real presence is still alive and at work in the world. He needs to impart that he has conquered the powers of death and darkness so that we can live in the light. In the Light of Christ no doubt or fear need ever again have power over us---

This is the peace that Jesus brings.

This peace is not the mere absence of conflict. Jesus is resurrected in a world that knows conflict and violence. Nor is it security. Jesus sends the disciples out into a world that is often hostile to their message; indeed, many of these early followers will die violent deaths.

No, the peace that Jesus brings is rooted in the Hebrew concept of Shalom. Shalom is a state of social and spiritual completeness and abundance that it not dependent upon the absence of conflict or our material needs and circumstances.

This kind of peace has reconciliation as its foundation. Jesus himself was God's peace in the flesh---Jesus' life is the perfect expression of shalom.

The certainty and trust we saw him display in his earthly life was not based on material wealth, his own personal safety, or even, I will argue, any concept of his own divinity.

The peace that Jesus gives to us is based on the sure and certain knowledge that God's love is present even in the most conflicted and tangled places of human misery. ----

Not simply as a silent companion helping us to bear our pain, but as a life-giving force defying the power of that pain to rob us of God's promise of wholeness and abundance. And because of this reconciliation is always possible.

Jesus teaches us that true peace, God's peace, does not mean the *absence* of struggle; God's peace promises the presence of love *within* the struggle.

God's peace is far more substantial than how we might think of peace-- it begins with the deep thanksgiving and gratitude that springs from a constant awareness that God's power to heal and give hope is alive and among us, here, now, always—and that through the power of the Holy Spirit we receive the sustenance, guidance, courage and compassion to be peacemakers in the world.

This peace is born of an encounter—an encounter between the human heart and the selfless love of God. The peace that Jesus brings is a peace that draws us away from ourselves and toward God.

This is a peace that has the power to enter the human heart, with all of its pain and sorrow, with all of its conflict—and transform it into an instrument of God's love.

This is a peace that moves out from us like ripples in water. This peace flows from the trust that Jesus has taught us what we need to know to heal our pain. This peace gives us the courage to be reconcilers in our families and communities.

All of us, each and every one, have the power to be a peacemaker if we have the courage and trust to do so.

Trusting in this promise brings newfound freedom to become vessels of God's love and forgiveness. Jesus' bidding of "peace be with you" continually calls us away from the anger, disappointment and conflict born of a mistrust and fear of one another.

The peace of Christ pulls us toward forgiveness, grace and generosity. And if we live out of those values the burdens of fear and anxiety are lifted. This is the way we heal our families, our church and the world in which we live.

This encounter with the risen Christ and his call to join him in his reconciling work in the world *takes place in community*. Our ability to share Christ's love with one another is our greatest witness to the world. Jesus tells us that the world will know we are Christians by our love for one another.

Think about this as we exchange the peace today. This moment in our worship is meant to be far more than a simple exchange of pleasantries or a time to socialize with friends in the midst of the service. It is in fact the way in which we remind each other that we are the body of Christ.

It is our commitment to reconcile and be reconciled with one another in love as we prepare to join one another at Christ's table. It is meant to remind us that we are part of Christ's loving and living presence in the world.

The exchange of peace is meant to offer in this present moment what the disciples experienced as they encountered the risen Jesus in their midst just days after they have seen him brutally murdered.

When we exchange the peace with sincerity and intent we become the living and breathing expression of Jesus' promise that though we may know fear and conflict and anxiety and suffering—we are never truly alone or lost in this world.

Often, when we feel we have been wounded or betrayed by others we want explanation or answers before we are willing to be reconciled. But today Jesus reverses that order. Standing before these men who deserted and betrayed him, he *begins* by offering peace. He teaches us that understanding, forgiveness and truth are what flow from the willingness to seek reconciliation first.

In embracing one another, we embrace with certainty the love of Christ alive and among us. If we believe in this love there is no fear, loss, anger or resentment that can bind us.

Fear, loss, anger and resentments happen---they happen all the time. But---we are the ones who decide to make them a prison or a way of life. When we are caught in any of these traps, Jesus offers a better way.

He stands among us to say "Peace be with you"

You are witnesses to these things, Jesus tells us today. He reminds us this morning that we are to take God's peace into our own hearts and then out into the world; -----having witnessed it and known it among ourselves we offer it to others.

God's peace is not after all simply the silence of guns after the battle or a promise that we will never know sadness or dramatic change in our lives. **** It is in fact the joy of Christ's reconciling love *painfully* embraced in the midst of our most difficult times or relationships.***** It is an unassailable witness to God's love for all of humankind and a call to love one another the that Christ loves us.

Peace be with you.

The Rev. Stephanie E. Parker
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Seattle
www.ststephens-seattle.org