

On Earth, Peace

April 24, 2022

John 20:19-31

¹⁹When 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.” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” ²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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.”

²⁶A 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.” ²⁷Then 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.” ²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” ³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But 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.

A man who was dead, walks into a room Jesus appears and says the most extraordinary thing. *Peace be with you.* This from this one who'd just suffered a staggeringly painful death. Still bears its marks. Said to the disciples who fled when he was arrested. Were not there when he died, even denied him, and who now have locked themselves inside out of fear, something he had never done. And he's not mad at them, or Disappointed or hurt by what they've done or haven't done. He's comforting them! Offering them peace, inviting them to forgive as he's forgiven them to realize that's in their power.

And then breathes on them the very spirit of the living God. No conditions, no requirements. It's there for them, exactly for who they are. And where they are. Thomas is not there, perhaps the only one not afraid to go out isn't there. And when he's told of Jesus' appearance, he can't bring himself to rejoice in it, he must have his own experience, like you and I want to have. Like every human being who was not in that room. Now, we cast aspersions on the man, give him the monitor, *Doubting Thomas*. But Jesus, the one doubted, doesn't. He appears again. Although I wonder if he was always there, just not seen, anyway, in this moment, he is seen and offers his wounds to Thomas to see and touch. *Look*, he says, with tenderness *I am scarred and yet I live*. This revelation of God's own woundedness this a vision of the vulnerable divine, brought forth from Thomas a confession of faith.

The Christ blessed Thomas, blessed all who doubt, but then blessed, too, those who do not see and yet believe. So indeed blessed all the world. Imagine for a moment the love that filled that room the perfect acceptance. What more witness do we need that death has no power over love. Everyone here has lost someone, some of you very recently, its only been days, weeks, months. The love you felt from them, you do still. Love is stronger than death. And yet it is with us, on such a massive scale. A million have now died from COVID. What does Jesus word of peace and power over death mean to the creatures and communities that are endangered by rising tides and storms and heat. Or to Ukraine where Passover ended last night. And today is Easter Sunday where there seems no passing over of terror and Risen Christ unseen, at least from here?

Shall there be on earth, peace? Jesus walks into a room, a traumatized community and speaks a word of love: *Peace be with you*. Everything holy, healing, redeeming flows from that. Let's start a smaller than the world. Let's look at Los Angeles where Father Gregory Boyle works with persons in gang life. There are about 450 gangs in LA. with tens of thousands of members who perpetuate war, generational hate, violence and death. For 35 years, Fr. Boyle has been speaking peace to people others might not see as worthy. But he knows have experienced levels of trauma. That he can not possibly comprehend. He says, we know that traumatized people create trauma damaged people cause damage. But then it must be equally true, that a cherished person can cherish themselves and others.

Father Boyle doesn't judge, he's not mad at them, even when they start using again, or leave, he speaks peace. Then gives them a job - always beside a rival gang member. *Okay, but I won't talk to them.* Right. Let's see how long that lasts. It doesn't. It's an ecosystem where enemies realize their mutual humanity and inevitably see each other's unshakable goodness. The goodness that God plants in everyone. He tells the story of one gang member who told him that the state ordered him and his brother to live with their grandmother who made them sit on the floor and taped over their mouths. I hate the sound of your voices, she said. And this man, who had been loved by Homeboy folks, said, about his own daughters: "I love their voices."

That when he and his wife find their eldest has taken a crayon and drawn across the wall. That instead of scolding her, as his wife asks him to he wraps his arms around his child and says *That is the most beautiful art I have ever seen!!*

Christ walks into the room and sees the goodness in his people. If he was present then, surely he is in Ukraine, and is witness to the goodness there, even in war: People are taking risks, dying for one another. Staying to care for the sick, the elderly, the children. In Russia, some journalists and politicians, and everyday folks, are telling the truth, fully knowing they will suffer terribly for it. And surely he is in Poland and Germany, and all places offering shelter and schooling and medicine to those who have fled the war. Physicians in Ukraine contacted St. Jude hospital in Memphis. Who have had staff at the border to bring out children with the forms of cancer that require the highest level of care. Speaking life into the mouth of death.

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was naked, and you clothed me sick and you cared for me, says the Christ. I am right here. You think you can crush the bones of the people and turn the landscape to rubble, you think you can lock yourself in a fortress, and God will leave you? Where else would God be but here? Father Boyle says, *The only God we have is the God of this world and the only world we have is the world of this God.*

My grandfather was an electrical engineer who started working on clean air in the 30's and 40's. Researched coal stacks and airplane fuel output, helped found the International Air Pollution Control Society to build awareness and

mechanisms for change. What would Grandpa say about what's happening today? Well, first, he'd be thrilled about electric vehicles, and that wind and solar power are growing exponentially, by 20% a year, helping climate goals come within reach. And that some electrical engineers just recently figured out how to get solar power from the night sky so that day or by night, we can have power. He probably felt like a voice crying out in the wilderness in his time, so I don't think he'd be mad at where we are, on the environment, I think he'd be amazed at how young people of the world are rising up and claiming the earth as precious, demanding that we stop warring with it. Reminding us, as God reminds Moses, to take off our shoes, for the place we are standing is holy!

Like the disciples in the upper room, we are on the earth in the presence of God. *Tread the Earth Lightly* is a hymn in our Faith We Sing hymn book by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette: let's sing one verse:

*Let there be greening,
birth from the burning,
water that blesses and air that is sweet,
health in God's garden, hope in God's children,
regeneration that peace will complete.*

What if we breathe in the peace that Christ offers us. The peace that regenerates life, health, hope, the peace that allows our souls to be at rest? Even when war seems war's only answer, let us remember the Christ who speaks peace. A few days ago, as we laid a body of a beloved family member to rest in a plot of earth. One of those present saw, clear as day standing there among us, the Risen Christ, and others around him, including the one who had died, who was full of joy! Oh, we wish we'd seen it, too, but blessed are those who have not seen and believed, Right? *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.* Pass it on. Amen.

Patricia Wagner, Maple Grove UMC