

## **Peace be with you**

John 20:19-31

May 1, 2011

Peace be with you.

If only it were true. Because we long for peace like we long for almost nothing else. We are hungry and thirsty for peace like we are hungry and thirsty for almost nothing else. We pray for peace more than we pray for almost anything else.

Peace for our restless souls, burdened by yesterday, anxious about tomorrow, and faced today with tasks and challenges and troubles that threaten to overwhelm us.

Peace among friends and acquaintances and family members, estranged by past hurts or divided from each other by present misunderstandings.

Peace among the peoples of this world, marginalized by bigotry, terrorized by violence, and enervated by poverty.

Peace be with you. If only it were true.

It is!

Peace be with you. That's what Jesus said to his disciples when he came to them and stood among them in the room where they were gathered behind locked doors. *Shalom aleichem*. Peace be with you.

He said it to them three times, twice the first time he met them and then again when he came among them a week later on the next Sunday night. *Shalom aleichem*. Peace be with you.

Peace be with you, instead of fear.

They were behind locked doors because they were afraid. They were afraid of the Jewish authorities, afraid they might be next, afraid their association with Jesus might lead to their arrest and prosecution and maybe even to their death as the authorities extended their efforts to purge the land of any remnants of this Jesus movement. Fear kept them hidden, behind locked doors, out of circulation, in the shadows, not taking any chances, entirely preoccupied with self-preservation.

That's what fear does. Fear keeps us from life, from doing things we want to be doing and should be doing, from going to places we want to be going and should be going, from being the people we want to be and should be.

Fear keeps us from fulfilling our purpose. We are meant to be sent, to be God's ambassadors, to be God's servants, to be sent as Jesus was sent, to bring justice and mercy and love, kindness and forgiveness and grace, to a world sorely in need of good news. But fear keeps us inside, close to home, where it's safe.

Fear disables love, but peace sets love free, because peace takes away fear. Peace be with you! There is no need to fear! Jesus is alive and the God who raised Jesus from death will guard you and protect you and save you from anything and everything that threatens your life. So go and be and do and live! As the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends you.

Peace be with you, instead of loneliness.

Surely the disciples were lonely. They were huddled behind locked doors, together. Together! They were together! That in itself seems to me quite a testimony to the work Jesus had done among them to make of them a band, a company, a team, a family. They were still together. They might have scattered, all gone their separate ways after Jesus was killed, gone back to their own homes, their own families, their own jobs, but they were still together.

They were together, but it is possible, isn't it, to be lonely even in a crowd? There have been times I have been surrounded by people, chatting and laughing and happily interacting, but still feeling very much alone, alone with the burdens of my own heart that no one else shares. I have seen people, in a good marriage, well loved by a spouse, but still lonely, lonely for a kind of love, a level of personal affirmation, that no spouse can give.

There is a hunger in all of us for love, for intimacy, for relationship, that only God can satisfy. That's why the disciples must have felt lonely, because Jesus had abandoned them! He hardly put up a fight. He offered no resistance when they came for him! In a moment, so suddenly, he was gone, and with him everything they had built their lives on.

They had given up pretty much everything for him, because he told them things and showed them things they had never seen or heard before. He convinced them God was on the move, ready to do something new and wonderful in their lives, in their lifetime. He brought God to them in a way they could see and taste and feel, but now he was gone, and all that he gave

them, all that he promised them, went with him. They were together, but they were a company of lonely men and lonely women, each of them encased in the shell of their own grief and sense of abandonment.

But then he stood among them and said: *Peace be with you.*

He is here! He has not abandoned us! God has not abandoned us! His presence is peace and that's enough. Who knows where we will go? Who knows what we will do? But he's here! He's with us! We will be OK. We can go and do whatever we will go and do ... in peace.

Peace be with you, instead of doubt.

Thomas is called the doubter because he wasn't willing to believe until he saw Jesus for himself. And so he was, he was a doubter, but I wonder if we may misread the source of his doubt. I don't think his doubt was intellectual. I don't think he was a skeptic, a rationalist, someone unready to commit himself until he was given sufficient proof, adequate physical evidence, to convince him that Jesus was indeed alive.

I think that for Thomas the doubt was planted not in his mind, but in his heart. The hesitation, the unreadiness to commit, was emotional.

I do that! I protect myself against disappointment by not raising my hopes. I would rather lower my expectations and then be pleasantly surprised, than have my high hopes dashed when something I have counted on doesn't happen. Sound familiar?

I can't believe you, I won't believe you, until I've seen him for myself. If I believe what you're telling me now and then it proves an illusion, I would be devastated. Oh, how I want it to be true, but I will not torture myself with empty hopes. Happiness is too risky and too fragile. I won't get my hopes up, lest it not be true.

But it is true! Peace be with you!

*Thomas, put your finger here and look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting and believe!*

Jesus didn't scold Thomas. He offered him peace. He gave him reason to believe, reason to be happy, reason to take the risk of being happy.

Jesus gives us reason to believe, even without seeing. Jesus gives us reason to be happy, even without seeing. Jesus gives us reason to take the risk of being happy, even without seeing. Because Jesus offers us peace. Because Jesus is our peace, and that peace is enough.

Peace be with you.

Jesus is alive. Peace be with you!

Jesus is among us. Peace be with you!

Jesus is. Peace be with you!