

Sermons at St. Luke's

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Joseph H. Hensley, Jr., Audrey Cook,
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(Acts 2:14a, 22-32, 1 Peter 1:3-9, John 20:19-31)

(Rev. Joseph H. Hensley, Jr.) Hear again these words from the Gospel according to John. "When 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."

Jesus says these words, "Peace be with you," not once, not twice, but three times in the reading today, and I was always taught that if something's repeated three times, you best well pay attention. And so we will reflect this second Sunday of Easter, what is this strange greeting that the risen Christ offers his disciples? Today we are observing a youth Sunday, celebrating and lifting up the ministry of youth at St. Luke's and three of our youth have offered themselves to hear the word and respond to it as preachers, and I've invited them to share with us their reflections on what this greeting of the risen Lord might mean.

(Audrey Cook) When Jesus first tells his disciples "Peace be with you" in the story from John's Gospel, it sounds as though he's trying to reassure them that he's really there. He's just appeared to them alive after being crucified, inside a room whose doors are locked, so his first words, "Peace be with you" seem to be a "Calm down, I'll explain, peace." These words are Jesus' reassurance and greeting to his disciples, but they also carry a deeper weight and a greater gift.

Now, first let's remember that Jesus' disciples were only human and just as fallible as the rest of us. Even though they experienced Christ's ministry firsthand, they often fell short of his expectations, questioned his reasoning, failed to understand all of His teachings. The disciples followed Jesus because they needed to be led, and after his crucifixion, they did not continue to teach his message, but lock themselves inside, as John says, "for fear of the Jews." These men were leaderless, fearful, confused. And so when Jesus first greets them with his peace, his words are meant to comfort them.

Sometimes in our own lives we also feel as though we fail Jesus. We also feel afraid or unsure, and so we come to church seeking those soothing words of "Peace be with you." However, we should remember that Jesus did not stop at "Peace be with you." Immediately following these words, Jesus tells the disciples that "as the Father has sent me, so I send you." He then breathes upon them, putting the Holy Spirit into them. So Jesus' words are more than an invitation to be at peace. They come with a challenge to go out in the world to share the peace and reconciliation of God with others.

Jesus' offer of reconciliation with us is the great gift in his words of peace. At this point in the Gospel, Jesus recently died a horrific death at the hands of ordinary human beings. Yet, in this passage, he returns only with an offer of reconciliation. He has not come back to pick up where he left off, to preach about Israel with his faithful band of disciples. Instead, he comes to the

disciples to imbue them with the Holy Spirit, to give them the help and courage to leave their room and spread his word. He wasn't held back by the locked doors of the disciples' room. And even today, he's able to overcome just as easily our own metaphorical locked doors.

But wouldn't it better if instead of expecting Christ to bypass our boundaries, we unlocked those doors and welcomed him in? At this part in the story, Jesus has finally given the disciples more than instructions, more than rebukes, more than parables. He's given them his peace. And by sharing this peace with them, Jesus has reconciled with them and forgiven their failures. He's literally breathed the Holy Spirit into them, letting it strengthen their resolve to spread his Gospel and share his peace.

This story also reminds us that Jesus didn't let his followers stay safe and hidden. He didn't let them feel settled. C.S. Lewis, the author of the Narnia series, gives another insight into this idea in his book, The Problem of Pain. He writes, "Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home." So when Christ offers us his peace, we should remember that it is not intended only for our comfort, but that we are meant to share the peace in turn.

In this day we've already been offered Christ's peace. It has been passed down from Jesus through the disciples in all the centuries of the Christian faith. And in order to truly have this peace, we have to pass it on as well. Christ's peace is not a promise of comfort in our lives and our faith. In fact, it often causes us to be out of our comfort zones and unsettled in our lives. Christ's peace is a reconciling force between people and a pathway to a greater understanding of him, but it is not comfortable to pass on. Like the disciples, we may be afraid to leave the locked room, afraid to share the peace with those who might judge us or reject us. We, like the disciples, may not feel ready to accept the task that Jesus offers. Yet, when Jesus sent his disciples out into the world, he first gave them the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And to this day, Jesus offers us that inspiration of that same Holy Spirit, and so we can share his peace with the world.

Before we leave this day, we will exchange the peace of the Lord with each other. When we spread this greater gift of God's peace among ourselves in church, not only are we strengthening our faith community and reassuring each other of God's love for us, we are giving each other the task of spreading that same peace of God out in the world. We live in a world that is not peaceful. We are often unsure of ourselves or afraid to unlock the doors and leave the room. However, by the grace of God and the Holy Spirit, when we end this service, we will take its final words to heart, "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

(Maggie Young) Good morning. So for our portions of the sermon, Erich, Audrey and I were asked to describe what the phrase "Peace be with you" meant to us as youth. Now, I've been brainstorming all week on how I, a 17-year old, could explain how that phrase expressed itself to me in a way that was not cliché, in a way that you adults had never heard before.

Naturally I decided to twist the prompt so that I could answer a new question in a new way. Can we as youth fully grasp the meaning of "Peace be with you" when we are at an age when we are developing our faith and developing what we, not our parents, believe in. With upcoming

transitions to college, SATs and worrying about what our latest Facebook statuses will be, how could we possibly know the meaning of peace?

In addition, as a youth, I'm beginning to question things that I've been taught all my life. Is it wrong to have doubts or questions? I'm not sure about anyone else here, but I find it very reassuring that Thomas, a grown man and a disciple nonetheless, doubts that Jesus has returned. This man witnessed the miracles of Christ yet states that until he sees and touches him, he will not believe. Now, what interests me in this passage is when Thomas finally does see him, Jesus says, "So, you are my disciple that does not believe what he can't see, yet so many around us have never seen me and still have faith." And I can only imagine the look on Thomas's face when he was called out by the Lord Jesus Christ.

But can you blame Thomas? Thomas has doubt in Jesus, but he still believes. Can we as doubtful people have questions about what we believe in and still find a sense of peace that so many look for? Haven't we all wondered about things that we learn? Four years ago I took my first mission trip to San Pedro, Belize. I was beginning to develop those healthy questions about my faith, and I wanted to know what this Godly place was that all the adults talked about. I wanted to see how a kind of place could seem "closer to God" without TV or readily available Internet access.

I was overwhelmed with excitement when we arrived, but when we made it to our motel with non-drinkable water and no AC, part of me wondered what the heck I'd gotten myself into. All of my questions disappeared when I saw those children at that school. They were so happy to see me, and they didn't even know me. It was on that first day that I thought I would never again know such the satisfying feeling of peace that I had with those children. Just because we wonder about who we are or ask questions doesn't mean God's fulfilling peace cannot be accessed.

Isn't that what sermons are all about? Making you think about a teaching in a fresh, new way you might not have thought about before. In fact, asking yourself questions about lessons is healthy. Blind faith can be a scary thing. We strengthen our faith through our questions, and by strengthening our faith we learn more about peace every day. Peace does not mean no more questions with complete understanding, though it can. Peace can be that wonderful feeling you get when you hear a baby laugh or make a child happy.

When I say, "Peace be with you," I'm not saying, "Well, I'll offer you a little peace, but you may not fully enjoy it if you have questions about your faith." I'm saying God's peace is for all. Take it into the world and allow yourself to be happy with the little things in life, regardless of whether or not you wonder. Because you can grow in your faith -- yes, you adults can still grow -- and find blissful peace. Just allow yourself to know that the two can go hand in hand. Peace be with you.

(Erich Hoffmann) Good morning. For us St. Luker's, I feel we have a pretty normal routine on a standard Sunday. We come in, we hear some readings, sing some songs, have some snacks, so on and so forth. However, taking a closer look at a standard Sunday at St. Luke's, we can kind of see a little bit more, specifically when we give each other the peace. Sometimes a hug, sometimes a handshake, a little peace sign across the room. Peace number one, we're used to

that. Before we leave, we get a little blessing, "Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God," number two. Okay, starting to notice a little trend. And then as we're getting ready to leave, here comes Jan Lamb, "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." If you haven't picked up yet, there's some peace going around. So there might just be a connection to today's Gospel reading.

In the Gospel, Jesus enters a locked room where the disciples are hiding and says, "Peace be with you." Now, to us that may just sound like a greeting, just something Jesus says. But Jesus doesn't just say things because they sound nice to preach. There's always a meaning behind them. Jesus always encourages His disciples to spread his word to all, even those whom we don't think of as worthy. However, the disciples were not really in a place to spread peace or any teachings. They were locked in a room, their teacher and entire reason for their being had just been killed. How were they supposed to continue? All they had come to know was Jesus. They had just followed whatever He was doing. But Jesus came and gave them a little reminder or nudge in the right direction. The disciples had learned so much from Jesus that they were in a place to teach, not to just be taught.

That peace of God that we give each other was already upon the disciples. They had it. Jesus was not bestowing more peace upon them, He was telling them what they already had as if to say, "What are you guys doing in here? I kind of gave you something really big and unique and special. You should be sharing it with the world." Jesus does not want us to receive the peace just to put it in a jar, stick it on a shelf and go, "Isn't that lovely?" It's something so amazing, so wonderful that no one person could possibly keep it all to themselves.

This reading is an assignment from God, a message to spread His message. I'm not going to lie. It's a difficult assignment to try and take on. To truly spread the peace of God? We have to do it dutifully and as often as possible. And it can be really tricky when you're around other people. Personally, I've been lucky enough to receive the peace of the Lord because of the work I've done with this diocese, but now it's my turn to go out and share it. It would be easy for me to linger here, take my little peace of God, put it on my shelf, but that's not the way it's supposed to be.

I'm sure that many of us have had similar experiences. We've all seen God in some way that has changed us dramatically. So what are we supposed to do? As we go forth in our lives there will be times when things seem dark, where the way's obscure and uncertain. Life is a terrifying thing sometimes, but God is always there to show us the way. The peace of God is a miraculous thing that we've all been given in one way or another in order to share it with the world. We should not, we cannot, keep it to ourselves because it's something that fills us up so entirely we have to go out and share it.

The disciples were given the most wonderful gift as they followed Jesus. They didn't realize just how perfect and whole and amazing it was until the resurrected Jesus stood before them and let them know "the peace of God is upon you." And now it is our turn to take our peace, take our love and understanding out into the world to share that wonderful fellowship that we have come to know inside here at St. Luke's.

(Rev. Joseph H. Hensley, Jr.) The risen Christ offers us peace. Not our peace, not the peace of Joe or the peace of Audrey or Maggie or Erich or any of you, but the peace of the Lord, a peace that comforts, but also unsettles us; a peace that resolves some doubts, but raises others; a peace that is wholeness, but comes only when we can allow ourselves to be broken and shared with the world; a peace that is stronger than violence, but can often only be known through suffering. We've sung a hymn many times that says, "The peace of God, it is no peace, but strife closed in the sod. Yet let us pray for but one thing, the marvelous peace of God." In this Easter season, we celebrate that Christ comes back from death to offer us this marvelous and mysterious peace. We pray for grace that we may share it with the world in Christ's name.