

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

In the name of the risen Christ. Amen.

I know that I have told you before that my father, when asked what he would like for a present for Christmas, his birthday, Father's Day, or any other time, always said, "Oh, just give me a little peace and quiet!"

Of course, what he meant was that we didn't have to get him anything, or that he would be glad for anything we chose. But sometimes 'peace and quiet' was meant literally - calm, stillness, harmony - in other words, the absence of the normal noises of life with 3 children.

He said it so often that every time I hear today's Gospel lesson, or some of the other 'peace' sayings in the Gospel of John, I think of him!

In today's gospel lesson, the disciples were locked in a room - hiding - for fear of what would happen to them as a result of Jesus' crucifixion. They were a disrupted, confused and fearful community, trying to make sense of everything that had happened in the last week. They weren't necessarily only worried that they would also be in trouble with the authorities, as Jesus had been. They might have also been afraid of the scorn of others who knew they had failed. They had failed at protecting Jesus. They were afraid of the cross. And they were ashamed.

Next thing they knew, Jesus walked right through the locked door of the room and the locked doors of their hearts and said, "Peace to you." He brought them the things they needed to recover from their shock and to move forward. The disciples could hardly believe what they were seeing and hearing, so he said it again, "Peace to you." "Shalom." Sometimes it just means "hello", but it is so much deeper and richer than that most of the time. Not just an absence of conflict. Not just calm and stillness.

Peace is connected to many other words through its Hebrew and Greek roots. In addition to shalom as a greeting, 'Peace to you' means there is an absence of fear... it means you are forgiven...it means you are set free. What a wonderful greeting to receive when we have locked the doors of our hearts in fear or in shame or in regret!

Peace to you.
Don't be afraid.
You are forgiven.
You are free.

Shalom means completeness, health and welfare - a state in which everything is as it should be between God and humanity. Jesus gave the disciples the gift of being at peace with themselves and the world.

This peace is a most mysterious thing; it is not dependent upon external circumstances; it is not linked to how well we're doing in our jobs or how well we're getting along with our families or how much money we have in our savings accounts or how well our retirement funds are doing in the stock market. It is a peace that descends upon our hearts and spirits as a gift from God.

All of that is what Jesus meant when he said to his friends, 'peace to you'.

First he told them there was no need to be afraid. Then he said it again. "Just as the Father has sent me, I send you." I send you - an active verb - I send you to do what I was sent to do also: to feed the hungry, to give shelter to the poor, to heal those who are sick, to set free those who are enslaved by the systems of empire, to treat everyone with respect and dignity because you are all my brothers and sisters - we are all the children of God.

Jesus didn't just want the disciples to sit around saying to each other, "Boy, that was some weekend! I'm glad it's finally over! Let's go home!" And the same goes for us. Easter isn't a one-time event of 2000 years ago and then it's over. And it's not even a once-a-year event where we come to church whether we need to or not, because the last time we came was a year ago. And it's not just a cliché that every Sunday is Easter Sunday. No. That is why we call the Sundays between last Sunday and the day of Pentecost, Sundays of Easter. Not Sundays in Advent or Epiphany

or Lent, but Sundays of Easter - a event that is always going on, a mystery so great that we celebrate it for 50 days.

So Jesus breathed on the disciples. Just as God breathed life into the human beings God formed out of the dust of the earth at the beginning of creation, Jesus literally 'inspired' - that is, breathed life - into them and 'inspired' - motivated - them to go out into the world to carry on his mission.

But there was a problem. Thomas wasn't there when Jesus appeared to the rest of the disciples. He didn't see him, didn't feel Jesus' breath on him, and didn't receive the commission that Jesus gave to the others. So when the others tried to tell him about Jesus return, he said he would need to see the wounds and touch them before he could believe.

Oddly, when Jesus reappeared the next week in the locked room, Thomas never did place his hands in Jesus' wounds even though Jesus invited him to. Though he had probably been afraid and confused and ashamed like the others, when Jesus greeted him with the grace-filled and forgiving words, "Peace be with you," he immediately believed and confessed, "My Lord and my God!" In the blink of an eye, Thomas knew that he was in the presence of God, and that he would never be the same again.

What Thomas saw was that the risen Jesus, the REAL Jesus, was the wounded Jesus. If you want to see the real Jesus, if you want to know for sure that Jesus is alive and at work in the world to touch and heal, then look for the wounds. The wounds are the best sign that someone is really the risen Christ. Thomas got that.

So we, even though we missed the original encounter that Thomas missed, can also see and touch the wounded Body of Christ because every one of us - every woman and man, every teenager and grandmother, every baby - is wounded, and every one of us is the Body of Christ.

If we want to answer our call to mission, we'll have to leave the rooms we lock ourselves in because of fear or confusion or shame. We'll need to step out from our locked rooms, our gated communities - and into the world. We'll need to be willing to share our wounded-ness, so that others may see God in them. And we'll need to be willing to not hide from others' wounds.

Our mission is to see the Christ in each other - to heal, to feed, to set free - by being Christ's Body in the world - touching - loving - healing - forgiving in Christ's name and to Christ's glory. The risen, living Body of Christ is in the world - breathing peace, bringing healing, and sending us forth, in love and in power. Thanks be to God! AMEN.