

Easter2\_YrC\_040713\_mcr  
All Saints

When I was little, and it was time to get a present for my father - his birthday or Father's Day, Christmas, etc. - my brother and sister and I would ask him what he wanted for the occasion. It was hard to choose for him - standard 'dad' presents didn't usually apply.

For Father's Day, the usual tools or outdoor motorized things (lawn mowers, chainsaws, chipper/shredders) did not interest him. He and my mother had switched domains in our household job scheme. Mama took care of the yard and Daddy did all the cooking. Buying him the latest in crock-pots did not seem like the thing to do.

And buying him a necktie wasn't the right thing either. He hardly ever wore one; he wore a clerical collar almost all the time unless he was in his pajamas.

Socks...how many pairs of black socks does one need? Handkerchiefs? Boring. Even nice dress shirts were a waste since he had all those black shirts to go with his collars.

So, we'd beg him and beg him for a clue about something he would like. Eventually, he would say, "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 it felt like what he was saying was 'don't bother me.' For him, sometimes 'peace and quiet' was meant literally - calm, stillness, harmony - in other words, the absence of the normal noises of life with 3 children.

This past week, I had an unplanned vacation of sorts. One of my seminary professors - my favorite one - died after a long bout with a number of physical problems and the added insult of dementia. I have been FaceBook friends with his wife for a couple of years, and with one of his 3 children, for whom I babysat when I was a student. His funeral was scheduled for Wednesday afternoon in the University Chapel - All Saints - at Sewanee. It seemed to me that there was no question but that I should go.

So I put on my clergy clothes and put some sweats in a small overnight bag, took some snacks and an audiobook, and left early in the morning for the long drive to Tennessee. It was raining hard for most of the drive. I couldn't use the cruise control. I had to pay attention. I couldn't hear the audiobook well because of the windshield wipers and the rain hitting the car roof. And there was a lot of traffic. So I ended up turning off the iPad and the cruise control, and drove to Sewanee with only whatever popped into my mind for company.

At first, there was a lot of stuff rolling through my brain. I thought about Don and everything he had taught me, and hundreds of other budding priests. I thought about his family. I thought about being in seminary all those years ago. I thought about my parents. Some parts of songs ran through my head over and over and over...and, finally, there was not much of anything in my head anymore.

It turned out to be, on the whole, a peaceful ride. I had not anticipated that. It was, I think, the kind of peace and quiet that my father longed for.

As much as that sounds like a wonderful peace to experience, there is a different kind of peace.

In today's gospel lesson, the disciples are locked in a room - hiding - for fear of what will happen to them as a result of Jesus' crucifixion. They aren't necessarily only worried that they will also be in trouble with the authorities, as Jesus had been. They might be afraid of the scorn of others who knew they had failed. They had failed at protecting Jesus. They are afraid of the cross. And they are ashamed.

So Jesus walks right through the locked door of the room and the locked doors of their hearts and says, "Peace to you." The disciples can hardly believe what they are seeing and hearing, so he says 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 like "Peace, man" in the 70's. 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.

Katharine Jefferts Schori, our Presiding Bishop, describes shalom in one of her books as "a vision of the city of God on earth, a community where people are at peace with each other because each one has enough to eat, adequate shelter, medical care, and meaningful work. Shalom is a city where justice is the rule of the day, where prejudice has vanished, where the diverse gifts with which we have been so abundantly blessed are equally valued." (KJS, *A Wing and a Prayer*, p. 33)

That's 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.

Folks, this is why we preach about what some people like to call - in a contemptuous manner - social justice. Here it is - in red letters if you've got one of those kinds of bibles: for the same reasons the Father sent me here, I am sending you out, too.

Jesus doesn'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. But thanks to the resurrection, Jesus is always here with us, bringing us shalom, and reminding us that we have been given the strength to carry out the mission.

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.

Jesus said this all-encompassing phrase one more time in this passage. This time, Thomas, who had missed the first visit between Jesus and the disciples, was in the room. Imagine how it must have been for them, this group who had seen their risen Lord, except for one. For a long week they had been trying to convince this guy that he should believe them, but he refuses. It must have been pretty tense. Arguments had probably cropped up. Life might not have been so peaceful.

"Peace be with you."

Think about what it meant to that group of friends and what it means to all of us as well; Jesus offers his shalom the minute he enters the room. To repeat this offer of shalom, of peace, of well being, of forgiveness is to make it clear that we are all invited before we even have a chance to apologize or defend ourselves. We are set free. The Christ calls us to live into his peace as a way of reaching our own peace with each other and within ourselves. And we know that no matter what, God is with us.

So let us nourish our bodies with the feast prepared for us before the beginning of the world, to strengthen us for the mission that lies ahead - the mission of making Christ known in the world. Peace be with you. Allelulia!