

Easter 2, Yr C, 041110
All Saints Episcopal Church
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When my sister and brother and I were young and we wanted to ask Daddy what he wanted for Christmas or his birthday or even Father's Day, he always had the same answer - always: "Oh, I just want a little peace and quiet." On the one hand, he was trying to let us off the hook, to let us know that he wasn't being particular about whatever present we chose to get for him. But on the other hand, it always felt as though he was a little bothered by us - 'peace and quiet' meant to me for us to be seen and not heard - or maybe even not seen too much, either.

In Daddy's case, 'peace' meant a personal inner tranquility - calm, stillness, harmony - the absence of the normal noises of life with 3 children.

This past week, as I took a real honest-to-goodness vacation from the office, I thought about Daddy's wish. I, too, hoped for a quiet, still, harmonious time of doing nothing.....what was I thinking? Because even before Holy Week was over, I had come up with a two-page list (double spaced) of things I wanted or needed to accomplish over the next week. It stressed me out just to think about the list - how would I get it all done, how could this possibly be called a vacation, how would I feel when I got to the end of the week?

Well, I didn't get everything done. But more things got crossed off than are left undone - a much higher percentage, I believe, than ever before (if I were into that sort of obsessive compulsive measuring, which I am not, I promise). And I feel at peace - I have personal inner tranquility.

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus says to his disciples, who are locked in a room - hiding - for fear of what will happen to them as a result of Jesus' crucifixion - Jesus 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 personal inner tranquility.

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.

Our Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, describes shalom 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.

And he breathed on them. Just as God breathed life into the human beings he 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."

I've never thought about it before in this story, but 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. The Christ calls us to live into his peace as a way of reaching our own peace with each other. 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.