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Our Saviour/St. Stephen
April 7, 2024
2nd Sunday of Easter

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

So, sisters and brothers in Christ, this Sunday is the Sunday of the story of Doubting Thomas.

And in my opinion, Thomas has always been misunderstood.

Thomas has been misjudged.

He has been misinterpreted.

He is not a bad guy.

He is not a bad Jesus-follower.

In fact, the earliest Christian creed is attributed to him, to Thomas, of all people.

For upon seeing the resurrected Jesus, he exclaims, "My Lord and my God."

And this declaration by Thomas is a new statement about the godhead.

Jews had and still do confess God as one, God alone in whom they believed.

Their confession is called the *Schme*, and it is found in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone."

But now, Thomas says in our gospel, "My Lord AND my God."

Here now the term "Lord" distinguishes Jesus from "God" who is the Father.

There is now one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ.

And Thomas is the first to acknowledge this.

So, we shouldn't cast aspersions at Thomas, he gave the church its earliest Christian creed.

PAUSE

But, today, I am more interested in talking about the words of Jesus in this text.

In particular, I am interested in talking about the words by which Jesus greeted his disciples.

For the text on this Sunday says, that it was evening on that day, that first Easter Sunday...

It was evening on that day, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews.

The disciples were hiding in fear, why? Because what had happened to Jesus could very well happen to them.

The disciples are concerned that they, too, may be crucified, being that they were followers of Jesus.

So, the disciples are locked away in some room.

They are hiding out, when suddenly, Jesus came and stood among them.

And how Jesus got into the room seems something of a mystery here.

For all we know Jesus just passed through the locked door, even though Jesus had been raised body and all.

Nonetheless, Jesus mysteriously came and stood among the disciples and Jesus says, "Peace be with you."

And Jesus then shows the disciples his wounds, and after doing so, Jesus says again, "Peace be with you."

PAUSE

Now at first, we might take this to be a casual greeting among Jewish friends, right?

"Peace be with you." "Shalom."

But then we remember what Jesus had endured only a short time before.

Jesus had been forsaken by all his disciples.

The disciples had run off when the authorities came to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus.

Jesus' closest friends, his companions, those who had travelled around with him for three years, they just up and left him.

And so, it is most gracious, MOST GRACIOUS of Jesus...

It is abundantly generous of Jesus, that when he first greets the disciples, he says, "Peace be with you."

"No hard feelings. I forgive you," is what Jesus is saying.

"Peace be with you."

And just to drive the point home, what does Jesus do next?

He shows them his wounds in his hands and in his side...

The places where nails had been driven into his flesh, and where a spear had pierced his side...

He shows the disciples his wounds, which were not just a means of identifying Jesus.

No, I think what Jesus is also saying to the disciples is, "See, this is what happened to me. You deserted me and I was tortured and crucified."

But, Jesus doesn't hold it against them.

That is the grace here.

Instead, Jesus says a second time, "Peace be with you."

PAUSE

"Let there be peace between us," so says Jesus.

And this peace is more than just reconciliation between Jesus and his disciples.

This peace is for encouragement in light of the mission the disciples are now called to perform.

For notice what Jesus says next, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

“Say what, Jesus?”

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

“You mean, you want us to go out there, Jesus?”

Yes, the disciples were supposed to go, to depart, to leave the room they had been hiding in.

Jesus is telling them that they are sent out, but even so his peace abides with them, his peace goes with them.

That even though they (the disciples) may experience trials like Jesus, they are to go in peace and are to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

PAUSE

But, then, a week passes.

It is a week later, and where do we find the disciples?

Out on the open road boldly proclaiming the Gospel?

Hardly, they are still in the room locked away, hiding from the world.

And so, Jesus has to appear to the disciples yet again.

“Get going, you disciples. What are you still doing here?”

Now, Jesus doesn't say that, but that must have been what he was thinking.

Instead, he again says, “Peace be with you.”

PAUSE

Now the next passage in John's Gospel after Jesus appears to the disciples in the locked room a second time...

The next appearance of Jesus is by the Sea of Tiberias.

The disciples have left the room.

And, we think, “Alright, the disciples have gotten the hint. They are going to proclaim the gospel.”

But, nope.

The disciples are together by the lakeshore, and of all things, they decide to go fishing.

And the episode here is meant to suggest that the disciples are returning to their former lives.

For remember, many of the disciples including Peter were originally fishermen, when Jesus called them.

Forget everything they had experienced—healings, miracles, and the death and resurrection of Jesus—forget all that.

The disciples just go back to their former lives.

And, Jesus must have been getting exasperated.

Jesus finds the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he must have been thinking, “Ugh, what are they doing now?”

And in that particular passage by the Sea of Tiberias, Jesus takes the time to reassure Peter who had denied Jesus three times at the time of Jesus’ suffering and death.

Jesus reassures Peter, so as to instill peace in him.

PAUSE

Yes, peace is of paramount importance in John’s Gospel after the resurrection.

And that peace involves reconciliation between Jesus and his disciples.

And that peace involves empowerment so that the disciples can be witnesses to the Gospel.

PAUSE

Now in the time of Jesus, there was another peace that captured people’s attention.

It was the *pax romana*, which was the Peace of Rome.

It was the peace the Roman emperors provided, like emperors Augustus and Tiberius.

After civil war had plagued the Roman Empire on and off for 100 years, the emperors finally brought internal peace, and of course, it was a well-received blessing.

Imagine that—100 years of civil war.

And so, we hear Jesus words in John 14:27 differently in light of the *pax romana*.

Jesus says there, “Peace I leave you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives...” (Sounds like he is alluding to the *pax romana*.)

“Peace I leave you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

And then, like we said, at the end of John’s Gospel the resurrected Jesus bestowed that peace on his disciples, not once, not twice, but three times...

But again that “peace” doesn’t seem to have taken root, at least not initially.

To the contrary, the disciples would rather hide behind a locked doors.

They would rather return to their old lives.

But Jesus continues to seek them out, offering them peace and sending them out.

It reminds me of that last verse in Psalm 23.

Surely God’s goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.

An actual better translation is this.

Surely God’s goodness and mercy will pursue me, like a lion after its prey, all the days of my life.

God’s goodness and mercy will pursue me without ceasing.

God’s goodness and mercy will hunt me down.

God’s peace will hunt us down.

God's peace will pursue us without tiring.

Because God's peace is that important.

It is almost as if God can't be at peace until we are at peace.

And this, THIS is God's peace—to be made right with God which for Christians, is understood to happen through Jesus Christ.

We are made right with God through Jesus Christ.

Which is also probably why Jesus shows his wounds to his disciples, so as to say that by these wounds, by my cross, you have been made right with God, and so you have peace.

Psalm 85:10 says it this way, "Righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

To be right with God, which is what RIGHT-eousness means.

To be right with God is to be at peace.

And Jesus wounds speak volumes then about how there can be at peace among people.

That most often WE have to reveal how WE have been wounded by another, we have to show our wounds, in order for the other to see and to acknowledge then their fault, so that reconciliation can happen, and so that there can be peace.

PAUSE

So, that is our message for today, Friends.

Jesus, by his wounds, bring peace to his disciples.

And brings peace to us.

And Jesus brings peace to us, makes us right with God, and in so doing, Jesus empowers us to be witnesses to the Gospel and peacemakers in the world.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.