

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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We are officially in the Easter season—the season where the trumpets blare and our Alleluia banners wave and confetti comes down as we joyously proclaim Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed, alleluia!

Except... as our Gospel reading begins, it kind of feels like someone should have told the disciples that.

I mean, Mary Magdalene has already come to them, rejoicing and declaring “I have seen the Lord!” They know that Christ is risen!

So, we expect to find them celebrating, out in the streets, sharing the good news of Christ’s resurrection with everyone around them. But instead, we find them hiding behind locked doors, afraid.

We hear that they are afraid of the temple authorities—likely afraid that they will be blamed for Jesus’ body disappearing. Likely afraid that they might be next. But I wonder if they were afraid to face Jesus, too. After all, they had abandoned him; Peter had even denied him three times. So, when Mary came and joyfully proclaimed “he is risen,” I imagine that alongside their confusion and fear and disbelief, they also must have felt a deep sense of shame.

And it’s into that shame, into that confusion and fear that Jesus issues an astonishing word of grace to them. He doesn’t say “where were you?” or

“why did you abandon me?” Instead, Jesus comes and stands among them and says, “Peace be with you.” He meets the disciples exactly as they are and in doing so shows them that there is nowhere that he won’t meet them, that there is no situation too painful or confusing or scary for Christ’s peace to enter into. He meets the disciples exactly as they are and in doing so shows all of us that when we, too, hide behind locked doors—the locked doors of our own fear or shame or mistakes—Christ still meets us, offering a kind of peace that can only be found in him.

I’m struck by the type of peace that Jesus offers here. You see the disciples lived in a world with a very particular type of peace. It was the peace of locked doors, of keeping your head down and staying quiet. It was the peace of *Pax Romana*, a peace Rome maintained through brutality and military dominance, a peace that hung Jesus on the cross. And doesn’t that type of peace sound familiar? We, too, know the type of peace that is maintained through control, the type of peace that’s only possible because it comes on the backs of the marginalized, the type of peace that’s only possible because violence is being exported to Iran and hidden away in detention centers. We, too, know the type of peace that says, “lock your doors, don’t resist, and *maybe* you’ll be safe.”

It’s into that world that Jesus comes and offers an entirely different kind of peace. Jesus stands among the disciples, the very people who had utterly abandoned him, and instead of retaliation, instead of escalation, Jesus says “Peace be with you.” The peace Jesus offers is not rooted in fear, it’s not enforced with violence or dependent on exclusion, instead it’s a peace rooted in reconciliation. It’s a peace shared in relationship. It’s a peace offered abundantly to all.

And then, pretty immediately, Jesus sends the disciples out. He says again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And this tells us something important! It tells us that the peace Christ gives us is not just something we receive but is something we are called to embody out in the world. It tells us that peace—the type of true peace Christ invites us into in this Gospel—is only made real when it’s lived out in community together, when we unlock our doors, step into relationship, and allow the Holy Spirit to work through our actions and create a world where all have access to it.

And so, Jesus sends the disciples out into the world. This is where we finally get all of the trumpets blaring and the alleluia banners waving, right?

Ehh, not quite. A week later, we discover that the disciples are once again behind a shut door. Now, let’s give credit where credit is due—it isn’t locked this time! But they’re not exactly living out Jesus’ call either. And I think this part of the Gospel is so honest—our world doesn’t magically transform at Easter. Even after receiving his peace, the disciples are still afraid. And yet again, Jesus meets them with unending grace. Yet again, Jesus comes among them and says, “Peace be with you.”

Now, I’m curious. Where else do we hear these words “Peace be with you”?

That’s right, these are the words that we say to each other each week during the passing of the peace. And I think this part of the service can feel like a lot of different things. Sometimes it feels like a moment of genuine joy and connection. Sometimes it feels like the 7th inning stretch, a nice break after a long sermon to say a quick hello before “getting back to the service.” And sometimes, it can also feel anxiety-producing—after all, we’ve all had that awkward moment where you go in to shake someone’s hand only to realize

they're already saying peace to someone else and you have to decide if you keep your hand out there or try to play it off like you were never there.

But our Gospel today demonstrates that sharing the peace is not simply a break from the service, but it's a profound ritual all on its own. When we share the peace with one another, we are remembering this incredible word of grace that Jesus spoke to his disciples all those years ago. It reminds us, across the ages, that we continue to be invited into reconciliation and relationship with one another and with God. It reminds us that before we are sent out into the world, we are first grounded in Christ's peace.

And just like Jesus' disciples heard him offer this peace over and over again, even when they didn't quite get it, we, too, get to return to this peace again and again.

Some weeks, we go out boldly and embody this peace to all we meet.

And some weeks, we receive peace on Sunday morning and by Sunday night we're back behind our own locked doors.

But the good news is that Christ continues to meet us anyway. The good news is that every single week we have the opportunity to come back to this community and to receive Christ's peace from one another. The good news is that every single week we are re-fortified and re-sent, just like the disciples, to try again.

So later on in the service, when it's time to share the peace with one another, I invite us all to try something a little different. After Pastor Jason shares the peace, I want each and every one of us to pause for a moment and really

receive it. To close our eyes and imagine that Christ is coming to us wherever we are today, to whatever is troubling us, and offering peace.

And then, when we turn to share that peace with one another, I invite us to do it with intention, to try to find someone we don't know or don't normally talk to, to slow down and say the full phrase "The peace of Christ be with you." And I invite us to really think about what it is that we're offering.

Because we are not simply greeting each other. We are making a commitment to one another, a commitment to actively work toward the conditions that will bring one another peace, a commitment to practice embodying a peace that is not rooted in fear or exclusion or control, but is built in community and rooted in reconciliation.

Friends, Christ is risen! Jesus appeared to the disciples all those years ago to show that Christ's peace will always triumph over violence and fear and locked doors. May we in this service, receive Christ's peace from one another. And then may we go out into the world and live it boldly in all that we do. Alleluia. **Amen.**