

Third Sunday of Easter, April 18, 2021, Luke 24:36b-48

How often do you ask yourself, or wonder out loud to friends, “What’s going on in this crazy world today?” And when you do, how many opinions do you usually get as to what the world needs to make it better? Probably as many opinions as there are people responding!

Well, my opinion is, and as I’ve said before, “my sermon, my opinion” that in this morning’s Gospel reading Jesus offers us the answer to what the world needs when he extends to them the greeting, “Peace be with you.”

The peace Jesus offers is not just the absence of conflict, it is the peace of the Lord and I think that is what the world needs today more than anything. The peace of the Lord encompasses the Hebrew concept of Shalom; wholeness, unity, love, and harmony with ourselves, one another, creation, and especially with God.

Take a moment and try to remember a time in your life when you felt truly at peace, life was good, you felt great, and all seemed right with the world. For me, that time was a while back, at our camp in the northwest part of the state. I was lying on a log bench near the campfire on a warm and sunny Saturday afternoon. A soft breeze was blowing and the smoke from the campfire was drifting slowly up through the treetops. It was quiet, it was peaceful, and I felt close to God. That was a moment of shalom in the midst of a sometimes-crazy world. That was Jesus, coming into my world and saying, “Peace be with you.”

We need to savor those moments when we can because the world is always trying to take them away. The news is filled with anything but shalom; violence, abuse, floods, fires, and almost any other tragedy one can imagine jumps out at us as “Breaking News!” At our house, we turn the news off when our grandsons are there because it is so upsetting, especially to Brooks, the impressionable 5-year-old. But we never outgrow the impact those stories have on us. We may become a little hardened to them as time goes on, but their effect is always, unfortunately, with us. It is a global case of “Disturbing the Peace.”

One of the few remaining sanctuaries of peace we can find is, appropriately enough, the sanctuary in which we worship, or whatever reasonable facsimile we can find when we don’t feel good about having too many people in one place at one time. We begin our worship during the easter season with the Kyrie, “In peace let us pray to the Lord.” We go on to pray for the peace from above, the peace of the whole world and the unity of all. Later in the service, I pray that the peace of the Lord will be with you all, you return that prayer on my behalf then share it with those gathered here and online. Our whole liturgy, or order of worship, is, in fact, patterned on Jesus’ appearance to his disciples there on the seashore and at other times before his ascension into heaven.

In its most basic form, our worship follows a four-part pattern of Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending. In our gathering we come together for praise and prayer. Like the disciples, we come here to share support for one another and to seek the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

As we worship, Jesus comes to us, not in his own human form but in the form all who gather, either in-person or in some other way, to seek the peace he can provide in our times of both chaos and joy. Jesus promises in Matthew 18:20, “where two or more are gathered in my name I am there among them.” Jesus is here, Jesus is there, if you are watching this after the fact, Jesus is wherever we are because he promises to be with us always, even to the end of the age.

After we have gathered and prepared ourselves for worship, Jesus comes to us in the Word of the Lord, Old Testament, Psalms, Epistles, or letters of the Apostles, and the Gospel, the Good News of the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. The Living Word gives us hope that, despite the chaos of the world, we can know the

peace of the Lord by God's grace and the power and work of the Holy Spirit. That peace is passed on to us through Jesus to his disciples, from the disciples to the church and through the church to the world.

Many times in his ministry, like in our gospel reading this morning, Jesus shared meals with his disciples, something we Lutherans seem to take special delight in! The most important meal we share, while it seems meager by worldly standards, is the most abundant and nourishing meal we could ever ask for.

A small piece of bread or tiny communion host and a sip of wine or grape juice does not seem like much, and in and of itself, it is not. But in the sacrament, used by the command and in conjunction with the Word of God, that bit of earthly food is the source of divine healing; forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life. And, while we do not have provision for any sort of remote eucharist, God's grace, Jesus' forgiveness, and the gift of the Holy Spirit is surely with all who believe and who partake of Holy Communion whenever possible.

We gather as the people of God, we hear the Living Word of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are nourished by Christian fellowship and the Eucharistic meal. Finally, we are sent back out into the world to boldly proclaim and generously share the peace that we have found in worshipping our Lord. "Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations of the world, beginning from [St. Mark's, or wherever you are.] You are witnesses of these things."

The world is in need of peace now more than ever. When our worship ends, we are sent out with the words, "Go in peace", carry the shalom of God with you into the world, "Share the Good News," proclaim repentance and forgiveness in Jesus' name to all nations; Alleluia Christ is risen, he is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.