

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Third Sunday after Easter: April 18, 2021

“Peace be with you”

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Good morning, on another amazing Sunday. Christ has risen, and in today’s scripture not only does he appear, but he begins a question and answer session with the disciples that we can continue to ask and answer today.

Appearing to the bewildered disciples as a group here, on what probably is Easter evening, Jesus says to them “Peace be with you.” Then he asks them a sort of double question: “Why are you frightened and why do doubts arise in your hearts?”

The “why are you frightened” question, in this context, reminds me of Biblical angels, who are always going around saying to people, “Fear not!” They wouldn’t need to say it quite so often if people weren’t scared in the first place, right? Here in Luke, the immediate fear is that the disciples thought they were seeing a ghost.

Dead people, after all, generally don’t *attend* gatherings. That’s already a decent reason for the disciples to be, as the text says, “startled and terrified.” And then if we think back over what they’d just been through: the betrayal, witnessing the beatings, the crucifixion, and then the burial of their most beloved teacher, how can we blame them for being just a little off balance?

Yet, Jesus begins his meeting with them with “Peace be with you.” This tells me that the promises of God do not lie in the calm parts of life, but rather in the things that make us grow. The things that may hurt us at times, the things we witness that we would rather not. Just like the crucifixion and the burial of Jesus, life can turn on a

dime. We all know that. We are all one call away from a tragedy. You only have to turn on the news to know that.

But we are also one phone call away from wonderment. Hearing from someone you haven't heard from in a while. The opening of your favorite restaurant. The ability to have Communion in the parking lot.

“Peace be with you.” Jesus says this to the disciples who are still frightened. And even given the concrete chore of feeding Jesus some fish, they continue to be a little shaken, and hold a little doubt.

After all, it's been said that courage is *resistance* to fear, *mastery* of fear, not the *absence* of fear. So it's OK if we look around us and find the world to be frightening in times like these. It is OK to doubt a bit, on what God really has planned. The key is not to let that fear or doubt shut us down, but to find ways to resist it. And today, Jesus is asking us not only to resist our fears, but in some way to have a peace about it.

Some of us may be able to find that peace in little ways and others do that on a grand scale. For instance, I'm overwhelmed by our elected official's efforts to bring this pandemic and economic crisis to an end. I am encouraged that our country is admitting to its bitter treatment of the **other** in its history, and the search to find ways to do better.

On the more local scale, I am encouraged at how we as a church community continue to find ways to support each other and the world around us. In times like these, when the news is constantly spinning negativity, and we see people living on the edge of violence, we have to remember this is not new. The disciples had seen their fair share

of executions, of political unrest, and even divisions within their own Jewish faith tradition.

Even with what Jesus had endured right in front of them, Jesus himself still greets them with “Peace be with you.” Why? Because what we endure on this earth is not all there is. Our struggles here can actually make us grow on a spiritual level that endures beyond this lifetime. Yes, Jesus explains he had to die, or we wouldn’t have a risen savior, one who has conquered death itself.

The text says Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, explaining why things had to unfold the way they did, through his suffering and death, and now his resurrection. Then he assured them, as witnesses of all these things, that they would soon be “clothed with power from on high.” That’s a bit of foreshadowing there, a nod toward the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit would whoosh around like a mighty wind to inspire and energize the whole new early church.

Meanwhile, for today, which appears from Luke’s telling still to be Easter evening, they have Jesus with them. They have these signs that he is alive and they have this future promise of power from on high. And while he knows they’re still pretty frightened by the big picture, he’s also asked of them something they can handle, something more concrete: “Have you got anything to eat?”

This may be making simple something more complex, but since it seems the disciples never really resolve their doubt and fear, Jesus gives them a chore to do. Something to take their minds off the horror they have witnessed and the confusion they are feeling. Just like frightened children, he gives them a chore. Feed me, he says.

We continue to embark on uncharted territory as time moves us forward through 2021. I can imagine most of you have felt frightened, disappointed, and a little

uncertain as to what the future brings. My response to you, just as Jesus states is, “Peace be with you.” Don’t worry, I, like you, need to hear this too.

I invite you as we move forward in Easter Season and head to the movement of the Holy Spirit, that we find a chore to do. Something simple. That may be feeding someone, it may be making a visit, starting a garden, planning a vacation. That chore could be anything that you feel called to at this time. And I urge you as you go about finding and doing what you are called to do, that you open yourself to what God is revealing to you. Being witness that through Christ we can somehow make it through. Immersing yourself in service, study of scripture, a little less of the news, a little more prayer, and “Peace be with you.”

So when Jesus asks *us* here, “Why are you frightened?” I don’t imagine there’s anything wrong with giving him a whole *list* of reasons why. This is why we pray. We are called by knowing Jesus and understanding that his suffering was not only for us, but for everyone, that we can unburden ourselves through prayer. Again, another concrete chore to sooth the heart and soul.

It is alright to admit we are frightened. It is alright if we have some doubt as to what God has planned for the future. So long as we also hear him saying, in this same text, “peace be with you,” ... I’m alive and well... and not only are you never alone, but “you will receive power from on high.”

Sure, it’s scary out there. But God showing up when we’re frightened to see us through, is one of the things God does best. God can take the cruelty of human nature and make it somehow humane and even redeeming. He can take a crucifixion and turn it into a resurrection. Whenever and wherever God’s work is being done, have faith and when his messengers show up, the message will always continue to be, “Do not be afraid, and “Peace be with you.” **Amen**