



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA
Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick
2nd Sunday of Easter April 19, 2020
Sermon: "Healing Peace"
Gospel Text: John 20:19-31

These days many of us have come to understand the world differently. Perhaps many of us can hear this gospel differently even if we have heard it dozens of times before. This year, I find a lot calling to me and I hope maybe to you. Most years, I have looked out over a packed room on Easter and then a smattering of folks the following week. But this year, none of us are in the room, and we were not last week either. For that matter, few of us know exactly when we will walk out from behind our closed doors, except for those who have to.

A younger me sometimes wondered what was wrong with those disciples. An older me, with more of life in the rear view mirror, and maybe "just a little wiser" me is sitting here differently.

I even look at this story with a wearied sense of knowing.

As I look at all of the disciples and how they are being, these words come to mind,

"It would have been understandable."

Because the world has become unbelievable.

After all in a matter of weeks everything suddenly looks so strange and people fear that they cannot escape it no matter what they do. Yet being hyper vigilant has them frazzled and frail.

Sound familiar?

Like I said, it's understandable.

After Jesus' death, it would have been understandable that the disciples are afraid they will be next if they don't lay low. They can't just go grab dinner like they used to. They can't even really figure out what to do when everything that grounded them is upended. Every activity they have known is shut down now.

It would have been understandable for them to be overcome by what has happened, what will happen next, and how bad it will be, or whether it will get better. Understandable for them to be in a fog, after all they have lost a friend, a teacher, and a savior- and grief is exhausting work.

It seems that everything they counted on has seemingly failed somehow. It would have been understandable for them to project onto each other their own shortcomings, and the nagging pain of hurt feelings, finger pointing and confusion.

The room where the faithful are gathered with the door locked is full of people nursing their wounds and wondering how they will live now. Now more than ever I see why Jesus comes into their midst and why now more than ever the first thing in the room is God's heart. Jesus shows up in this room to show the healing power of resurrection and the cross. To show them that wounds will be healed, because the reasons they are locked away in that upper room are all too understandable, not only to them. They are understandable to God too.

Now more than ever I feel in my own bones why the first thing Jesus speaks to his followers is the most important thing they (and we) most need-

He speaks peace-

"Receive my peace."

No matter what the fears and doubts and hurts are that flare up, Jesus says it again and again.

Peace that is not a directive of "you must be at peace."

Not a criticism of "Why aren't you at peace?"

The peace Jesus speaks into being is like a soothing balm that covers and heals all the places it fills.

Peace.

Peace beyond our understanding is the only thing that can begin the healing.

Peace.

Without it we cannot move beyond fears, doubts, hurts.

Peace

It's what we cannot manufacture for ourselves, at least not for long.

Peace.

Dose after dose of peace for you.

But of course, not everyone Jesus wanted to heal that day is there.

Where's Thomas?

Maybe he is the front line guy who chooses to go or has to go get what people need to survive locked down.

Maybe he has chosen to isolate himself from the emotions of the group that rage like a contagion.

Maybe he is wandering and wondering what day is it anyway?

And maybe as wounded as he is, when the disciples tell him they are starting to get better, he is wounded again by the fact he missed out.

But do you see what Jesus does?

He's not cutting Thomas off from new life.

Jesus comes again with more doses of peace.

To make sure that Thomas, whose symptoms maybe are different isn't left out of the cure of his wounds.

He starts by reassuring Thomas it really will work.

This year I love that Jesus tells Thomas, "you can touch me, it's ok."

Jesus keeps showing up with healing peace.

Dose after dose of peace.

Until that word and those feelings dwelling within us begin to rebuild us.

"See, I bring peace."

This peace doesn't mean they wake up and it was all just a dream.

It won't ensure that the world outside the door is categorically altered.

But this peace is what allows them to be strengthened to walk in the world by the only cure that matters.

Christ has the ultimate power to conquer anything that would destroy us for good. There will be relapses for us, but the cure remains the same and Jesus keeps dispensing it. I think that's why John says these stories are told- so we begin to believe and continue to believe in the healing power of this Christ and this peace.

A younger me used to tell people it felt bad preaching to the first Sunday after Easter crowd about faithfulness because clearly you're here, while we probably thought about those Christmas and Easter people who are not.

But this year, none of us are here, as in, here in our church building.

Right now we wish the main place we show up was available to us and friends it will be again. Your feelings are understandable.

But now more than ever, we must remember and believe that if Jesus can walk through the locked door of those first hurting souls, Jesus can and will and does walk through the door of wherever we are.

Jesus is with you now to bring what each of us needs for this time and place.

Until we all are healed, this peace moves us from what we cannot understand to what we can believe.

We can stake our lives upon the power of our risen Lord.

So today we when we share the peace "virtually" take a moment and allow it to sink into you and begin to heal you.

Christ is with you and loves you and promises life forever in His name.

May the peace of Christ which passes all understanding be with you.

May the healing peace of Christ fill you.

And may the peace of Christ be with you always.

Amen and amen.