

God's Peace

King of Glory Lutheran Church
Easter 1 – Thomas John 20:19-31
Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry
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God grants us peace in these days when we are in place in our own homes. As we experience the Living Christ, God encounters us.... which brings us peace.

John 20:19-31 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." 26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Grace and peace to you in the name of the Risen Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior! Amen.

It's been one week. It's been one week since we experienced Easter and in John's Gospel it has been one week since the women saw Jesus alive at the tomb.

They followed the angel's instructions. They told the other disciples the tomb was empty. But so far as we can tell the news of the amazing, incredible, life-changing, one-time event of God being raised from the tomb had done nothing! The news that Jesus was alive had done nothing to change the behavior of the disciples. For all we can tell, they don't understand Jesus' death, they don't believe He has risen or is really alive, and they are literally locked in a room for fear.

Perhaps we're too harsh. Why wouldn't they be confused? Or scared? Judas was dead – the betrayer of their beloved Rabbi. Jesus was dead. What about the mission? What about the promises of the Holy Spirit coming and people's lives being changed?

Furthermore, at any second Jewish authorities might come to take them away like they did Jesus. So the door is locked. They've shut themselves up tight. No one going in or out.

Hmm....sound at all familiar? A little like, shelter-in-place maybe? Only one family member can leave to go get groceries – other than that, no one in or out. When they return, it's the now all too familiar wiping down of bags and boxes, then the shower to make certain the virus will not enter. Fear that at any moment the virus might come to take away our lives with its danger.

And yet....yet into that locked room appears the risen Christ! "Peace be with you!" Jesus says. Twice he says it with the large group and now a week later, He repeats it again to Thomas and the others. "Peace be with you!"

For we who are sheltering-in-place, if you're a working family with young children, the thought of peace is like a dream of buying the winning ticket in a 2 million lottery! Peace can seem as precious a commodity as toilet paper. For those of us retired or living alone, we can gain some semblance of peace by keeping the house picked-up, not checking news, having a regular sleep hours and projects to stay busy with during the day. These things are good for our mental health. Yet peace is more than just a pretty vase of fake flowers upon a dusted table. That kind of peace is momentary. Jesus' peace is not.

"Peace be with you!" The root of this word is to 'tie or join things together in a whole.' For example, when all essential parts are joined together, there is peace. It's God's gift of wholeness.

Jesus is now standing in the middle of the room and offering a new wholeness to His group of befuddled disciples. "Peace be with you!" It is as if He is saying, "Look, I'm alive and in my very flesh and blood, all the tragedy of the last few days is now whole. I am who you need to join the ministry we had with the mission you're about to go on!"

The Risen Christ is bringing His faithful ragtag band of men and women together in a new whole, that only God could've designed. Instead of staying in a locked room bound up with fear, Jesus grants them the harmony, the calm, the goodwill to go out faithfully with courage. This encounter with the Living Lord brings them peace.

You might have seen the news clip of a woman playing a grand piano in the midst of the rubble of First Wesleyan church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The tornado on Sunday ripped down the walls and scattered the cinderblock. But Tracy Coats was just passing by and saw the piano sitting there unharmed and still in tune. She sat down and began to play that beloved hymn, "It is well with my soul."

When the reporter interviewed her, Tracy said this. "We as humans, we're not made to carry this kind of load. It's just too much. But when we give it to the Lord, He can carry it for us and we can find peace in the middle of the storm."

Her words tell me that Tracy Coats has had an experience of the Lord. She knows the peace God alone can bring to us when we're in the middle of unemployment or coronavirus, or fear or trying to work and parent at the same time!

Jesus knew His disciples needed to see Him and so He came to them, not just once! But twice. Jesus came back for Thomas! God's grace comes to us again and again and again to provide us a sense of wholeness and well-being even in the midst of pain or fear or trauma.

You may well remember the story behind the hymn, It Is Well With My Soul. After losing four daughters in a tragic Atlantic Ocean shipwreck, Horatio Spafford penned the words.

1. When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.
 - *Refrain:*
It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.
2. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

In these days, brothers and sisters in Christ, pause. Stop. Look for God in your own living room. God is there. Feel the peace only God can offer. It is there. Know that a wholeness is surrounding you even if there is still fear. The Risen Lord Jesus Christ – who overcame death itself – understands our every fear and pain. We can walk forward with good courage. He is with us. His peace is with us. So say it out loud and believe that “It is well with my soul.”

Amen.