Easter 2

April 11, 2021

John 20:19-31

 We are baseball fans, my husband and I. There’s a lot I like about going to games, even if I don’t care about the teams playing. But there’s one thing that frustrates me: Games keep getting longer.

That games routinely last 3 hours makes me more appreciative of the 7th inning stretch. After sitting for the better part of 2 hours, it’s nice to have a chance to stand up, stretch a bit.

 Sometimes, it can feel like sharing the peace is like the church’s version of the 7th inning stretch. People have been sitting a while. We Lutherans tend to not move around a lot during worship, so it’s nice to get a chance to get the blood flowing again.

 But sharing the peace is much more than just a chance to move around a little or say hello to someone we haven’t seen for a while. And it’s placed where it is for a very important reason.

 In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that, if we are taking our gifts to the altar and remember that we have not reconciled with someone, we need to leave our gift *before* the altar — not *on* the altar — and go out to reconcile with that person first. And then, once we have reconciled with each other, once we are at peace with each other, we can place our gifts on the altar.[[1]](#footnote-1) Jesus wanted us to understand that us being at peace with each other was *that* important to God.

 It is our custom, then, to share the peace before we collect our offerings.

 Many of us have forgotten the *why* of what we do and, I think, we have forgotten *what* we are wishing for each other, as well.

 When we offer each other the words, “Peace be with you,” we’re echoing Jesus’ words to the disciples on the day of the resurrection.

 The word for peace that Jesus uses is similar in meaning to the Greek word for peace used in the Old Testament — *shalom*. Shalom is a rich, complex word that carries a meaning of not just peace, but wholeness, well-being, prosperity, and tranquility.

 When Jesus said, “Peace be with you,” he wasn’t just wishing it on the disciples, he was *giving* it to them. By entering into the room where they were hiding out of fear, Jesus offered them the comfort of his presence, and release from all that kept them from being whole.

 But he did *not* remove from them the *cause* of their fear. The Romans and the Jewish leadership who wanted to be rid of Jesus were still out there. Still opposed to his ministry, still unhappy with his followers.

Not only did Jesus not fix their problem, he sent them back out into the world to share the peace that they had received. Including with the people who were the cause of their fears.

When we echo Jesus’ words as we share the peace, we’re not just hoping someone has a good day. We’re not just hoping that they’ll forgive us for the times we said or did something wrong that hurt them.

We’re reminding ourselves that every one of us is broken and in need of God’s *shalom* to heal us.

We’re reminding ourselves that we practice peace with each other so we can go out and share that peace with the world, even when it is hostile to or indifferent about our faith.

And we’re reminding ourselves that peace is *complicated* but necessary work that allows everyone the opportunity to experience the sort of well-being that *shalom* is all about.

We hear this Gospel reading every year on the Sunday after Easter. It’s “the Doubting Thomas story.” But the problem for Thomas is the same problem the other disciples had— they were afraid, and their fear kept them hidden away.

What amazes me about this story is that Jesus shows up that Easter evening and gives them the peace that comes with his presence among them, *and* breathes into them the Holy Spirit… but they’re back in that same room the next week. And the doors are once again shut.

The good news of Christ’s resurrection did not erase their fears.

The presence of Christ among them did not erase their fears.

The gift of the Holy Spirit did not erase their fears.

Luther tells us that Christ’s peace is not going to remove us from disaster and death, from whatever it is that we’re afraid of. But it allows us to knowpeace in the *midst* of those things.

When we practice peace here, we are learning how to to bring peace into a world that can be full of sorrows and struggle and strife. Because just as God sent Jesus, we are sent into the world to bring *shalom.*

Jesus visited the disciples multiple times after his resurrection, so they’d be able to get past their fears and get to work. Just the same, we gather here again and again, and we practice peace, we practice being aware of God’s presence among us, we practice forgiving one another and accepting forgiveness.

And bit by bit, God’s *shalom* works in us, creating peace where fear once resided, loving us into wholeness.

Here, in this place, we learn what God’s peace is like, and we are sent forth to share that peace with the world, so that *all* people can know God’s *shalom.*

May the peace of God be with you always. And may you sow that peace wherever you go.

1. Matthew 5:23-24 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)