

Peace Be With You

This past week during the Morning Prayer services we heard a variety of resurrection stories. On Tuesday we were treated to what's often called the longer addition to the Gospel of Mark. The oldest manuscripts of Mark famously end with an empty tomb and the women afraid. Jesus never appears. It wasn't long before some enterprising scribe who didn't like that ending wrote what he considered a better one, using bits and pieces from the other Gospels, with language that doesn't sound like Mark. In the middle of what he wrote there's one especially discordant verse. Jesus upbraids the disciples for their lack of faith and their stubbornness in not believing those who told them of the resurrection.

That's a very human reaction attributed to Jesus. The disciples had deserted him when he was arrested. Three times Peter denied even knowing him. We would expect Jesus to be disappointed and angry. Yet in both Luke and John the first thing the resurrected Jesus says when he appears is "Peace be with you." In Luke, Jesus does ask the disciples why they are frightened, and on the road to Emmaus he calls his fellow travelers foolish because they do not understand the prophets. But he never does what I would call *upbraid* them.

Even Thomas is treated gently. Thomas, the brave, stout-hearted, concrete thinker, needed to see for himself. He wasn't with the others on Easter Day, so he missed the first time Jesus appeared behind locked doors. Thomas cleared his calendar for the next Sunday, however, so he was there when Jesus again said, "Peace be with you." Before Thomas could utter a word, Jesus turned to him and offered him the proof he wanted. Thomas was overwhelmed. "My Lord and my God!" was all he could say.

Thomas then became the springboard for Jesus to commend all those who believe without seeing – in other words, all of us. John the Evangelist reinforced that sentiment with his own comments. That's why this book was written, he said, 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."

As we travel through the Easter season we'll have the opportunity to further unpack the meaning of the resurrection. Each week will include a passage from the Acts of the Apostles. Today Peter gave a simple, elegant account of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension – and made it clear that the apostles must obey God rather than any human authority. In subsequent weeks a reluctant Peter will convert the first Gentile, Cornelius. Saul will have his blinding encounter with Christ on the Damascus road, changing him from an angry persecutor to a zealous preacher named Paul.

We'll also hear a lot from the Book of Revelation. Today's few verses from the first chapter lay the groundwork, taking us from the firstborn of the dead, Jesus, to his coming again. Within a few weeks we'll find ourselves at the end of time, as the new Jerusalem descends from heaven.

After all the excitement and pageantry of Easter Day itself, we need these simple meetings between Jesus and his disciples and the wonderfully poignant encounter with Thomas. The resurrected Christ did not upbraid them. He greeted them with love, with forgiveness, and with the Holy Spirit. "Peace be with you," he said. That's today's message from Jesus. Wherever you hurt, whatever you are going through, whatever you repent of, Jesus will come and say, "Peace be with you." There can be no greater comfort than that.

Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

[2 Easter: Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31.]