

The Third Sunday of Easter
April 15, 2018
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Luke 24:36b-48

Peace Be With You

Imagine, for a moment, what it would have been like to be in that room. Jesus was killed less than 53 hours ago. You sit among the remaining disciples, huddled together in a cramped house in Jerusalem—the very same house where Jesus broke bread before he was betrayed. Mary and the eleven disciples are there, together with a number of Jesus’ other followers from Galilee. The room is filled with fear.

Your leader—your Messiah—is dead. And your hopes of national salvation are shattered. When the Roman soldiers and temple guards confronted Jesus in that garden, he *should* have called upon legions of angels to fight back. He *should* have laid waste to Pilate and his garrison. And he *should* have liberated Jerusalem and all of Israel from Roman occupation.

Everyone in that room thinks Jesus *should* have won. But he wasn’t the warrior Messiah he *should* have been.

Instead, the one in whom you trusted ended up just like Theudas, or Judas the Galilian, or any of the dozens of other would-be Messiahs whose rebellions had been crushed by Roman military power, and whose followers had been scattered. Jesus was dead. That was the end of it. Or, at least, it should have been.

But now there’s new trouble brewing. There are rumors of Jesus sightings throughout the city—whispers that he’s been raised. And if the Romans catch wind of these reports, then they may suspect rebellion among his remaining followers, and come for you next.

It’s the middle of the night—somewhere between Sunday and Monday—and you and the other disciples are arguing about how you might escape from the city under the cover of darkness. The doors of the house are locked up tight and Peter has placed a watchman at every window, trying to secure your hideout.

And then suddenly [knock, knock, knock], there’s a knock at the door. A hush falls over the house—everyone fears the worst: “It’s the Romans! They’re coming for us like they did for Jesus, in the middle of the night! They’ve come to finish what they started!”

And then from the other side of the door comes a familiar voice: “Peter, James, John, open up! It’s me, it’s Cleopas. I have something I need to tell you!” Cleopas and his companion have rushed back from Emmaus. And they tell a fantastic story: another Jesus sighting.

And now the house is in a clamor. Everyone is talking over one another, some saying this is all the more reason to leave the city, other saying it means they should keep holding out. And you feel the dread building up in your body as you begin to wonder if the authorities can hear all this commotion. And then another voice speaks over all the others: “Peace be with you.”

Can you imagine? A house full of defeated, would-be holy warriors now confronted with the leader they watched die, standing in their midst, wearing the marks of his death like a trophy. Jesus bypasses the disciples' every security measure, he enters directly into their place of fear, and says "Peace be with you."

This greeting is met by what is perhaps the most profound moment of disbelief in human history. But that disbelief is met with a display of pierced hands and feet, an invitation to touch flesh and bone, and even a pescetarian demonstration of corporeality.

But this is more than just resurrection verification. The marks in his hands and feet are not merely proof that his body is the same one that was crucified. And being able to touch him and see him eat food are not merely proof that his body is real, physical and material.

These experiences are meant to break the disciples' assumptions about who Jesus *should* be. They are meant to help them transcend their hopes for a warrior Messiah. They are meant to finally convert them from violence.

For 53 hours, the disciples had thought that Jesus' death was his ultimate defeat. According to the warrior Messiah theology of the day, the Jesus movement had failed miserably.

But now, after dispelling their fears by showing them his risen body, Jesus opens the disciples' minds to the true meaning of scripture: The Messiah was always meant to conquer, not by killing, but by dying! The law, the prophets, and the psalms were fulfilled, not by an angelic assault on Rome, but by the cross.

To the disciples, the cross had looked a lot like Jesus had lost, but his risen body was proof that he had won a victory far greater than they could ever hope for.

Jesus *had* conquered Rome and overthrown the nations, but he had done so by overthrowing sin and conquering death. Rome thought it had the last word, but God had something more to say. The disciples hoped for war, but God had an alternative foreign policy in place.

The risen body of Jesus is the seal of God's victory through death and the token of our conversion to peace.

It is toward peace, not security, that the risen body of Christ moves us. When Jesus says, "Peace be with you," he says it to a room full of people whose chief concern is security. The disciples were caught up in fear, paranoia, and self-preservation, but no locked doors or night watches can keep Christ at bay.

When Jesus dispels their fears by showing the disciples his resurrected body, he liberates them from their need for security and, in so doing, he enables them to go out and proclaim peace. In fact, Jesus tells the disciples that the gospel of his victory is to be proclaimed to *all* nations.

In an ironic twist, he is sending them out as witnesses to the same nations they had formerly hoped he would violently overthrow. Their former battlefields were now their mission fields.

"Peace be with you." It is more than a greeting or even a comfort; it is a command. Disciples don't get to sit inside the panic room, mourning the loss of the warrior Messiah;

they are commanded to go out and proclaim peace in the name of the crucified-and-risen Messiah.

But make no mistake, preaching the gospel according to the disarmed theology of the cross to a world addicted to war was, is, and will always be risky business. But it is the business of the Author of Life—the dying-and-rising one.

It is not difficult to imagine what it would have been like in that room, for we so often live in it. We all have fears against which we lock every door – deep dreads for which we keep constant watch. So often we sit in the darkness between days, where whispers and rumors abound, and where violence haunts every hour.

But may the risen Christ bypass all our security measures, may he enter into our places of fear, and may he declare peace to us. And may we who experience his risen body in the flesh and blood of bread and wine, be converted to his peace and be witnesses to all these things. Amen.