

Sixth Sunday of Easter  
May 26, 2019  
Church of the Holy Cross  
The Very Rev. Denise Trogdon

## **The Gift of Peace**

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

These familiar words are taken from the farewell discourse of Jesus to his disciples, the night before he was crucified. They would not understand their import until later, when Jesus was no longer physically present to them. There would be times when this small band of followers would cling to those words with hope in the midst of persecution and suffering. While to be afraid in troubled times is simply human, Jesus reassured his dear ones that they would not be alone. An advocate, a holy comforter would be given as gift to be the presence of peace, no matter the circumstance.

Too often we think of the word peace as meaning the absence of conflict, the cessation of violence. But the Hebrew word “shalom” from which peace is derived, means so much more. It is the presence of something that defies logic, a wholeness and contentment, a heart that knows the current trouble is not the last word.

But why this reading in the midst of Eastertide? Have we not been rejoicing in the knowledge of Christ’s resurrection? Those disciples had been on an emotional roller coaster and soon Jesus would be leaving them once more to ascend to heaven. The Holy Spirit would bring them comfort in their grief and that peace was nothing less than the presence of God.

You may have also recognized this text as one that is often read at burial services. We, too, are to be reminded that when we lose someone we love, the Spirit walks with us in our grief. Although our burial liturgy is celebrated as an Easter service, in light of Christ’s resurrection, our prayer book notes that human grief is real. It is a sign of our deep love for one another, and the sorrow when we are parted by death.

Many of you know that over the last few years I have been involved in the care of my elderly parents. It has been my joy and privilege to visit and nurture them as they did for me and my sisters. This week we have walked the difficult journey of returning my Mom home to her place with the Lord. As I watched her earthly presence fade, I envisioned with the eyes of my heart, her heavenly bridge tournament with all of her favorite chums. She now has the sense of wholeness that comes in being in God’s loving arms. The loss feels overwhelming at times, and yet I am buoyed not only by the comfort of the Holy Spirit, but by the people in my path who have chosen to pass the peace on to me, when mine feels thin.

I wondered about whether I could preach this sermon given its subject and the rawness of my own emotions. I knew the subject was peace, but how could I be at peace with losing my Mom? She has been a woman of deep faith and when I sat with her in the last times she was actually speaking, she asked me to pray with her. When I finished praying with her, she looked me in the eyes and said, “Go home now and be at peace.” and my sisters replied, “and you also go home and be at peace.” Only the Holy Spirit knew that passing the peace would minister to our hearts.

Jesus said, “Those who love me will keep my word” and that word is peace, that only comes from God’s presence. We, like the disciples, must be that incarnation of Christ to one another. We make real the love of God, by sharing God’s shalom. So today, I invite you to take an extra moment at the peace to consider how your expressions of care make Christ present in our midst.

When I was a youngster in the Episcopal church, we had what was called “folk communions” done with guitars and more contemporary songs. One favorite was actually a restatement of our scripture today. It speaks to my heart and I would like to share the words. “Peace I leave with you my friends, shalom my peace in all you do, peace I leave with you my friends. I give to you so you can give to others too.” May this shalom be the word that we keep, and once we have shalom, may we give it away. Amen.