

Easter 2C  
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*Christ's Shalom*

Last week we experienced the joy and wonder of the empty tomb with the women. This week we encounter the disciples huddled together behind locked doors, understandably frightened and overwhelmed by the women's strange announcement. Mary and the others had come rushing from the grave claiming that the tomb was empty and that their Lord was not dead. But how could this be? How could any of this be possible? The events of the last few days had all been so unbelievable. Seemingly in an instant, everything had changed for them. Everything was different: their lives, their world, their future. Was this news such good news after all?

The only thing they know to do is to be with one another, to close themselves off from the outside world, paralyzed by their fear. Into this room, Jesus enters. As he did throughout his earthly ministry he does again this time among his grief-stricken and confused friends; he penetrates the darkness of their world with the light of his grace and mercy. To those who had left him to die alone on the cross, Jesus offers them peace. There is no rebuke for having abandoned him in his hour of need. There is no chastisement for huddling in fear. There is only, Peace be with you -an ordinary greeting and yet an extraordinary gift. Jesus gives his frightened followers the gift of himself.

The Rt. Rev. William Willimon writes about that first Easter, "Nobody actually saw Jesus rise from the dead. They saw him afterwards. They didn't appear to

him; he appeared to them. *Us*. In the Bible, the 'proof' of the resurrection is not the absence of Jesus' body from the tomb; it's the presence of Jesus to his followers. The message of the resurrection is not first, 'Though we die, we shall one day return to life,' it is, 'Though we were as good as dead, Jesus returned to us' ... This is the dynamic of the Easter experience ... Jesus comes back to us. *Us!*' Showing them his hands and his side, the marks of his own humanity, Jesus invites his friends to shed their fear and shame. His words of peace are signs of his reconciling and enduring presence.

This story is one of only a handful of scripture passages we hear every single year on the same Sunday. It makes sense to read the story right after Easter since it is the disciples' first encounter with their risen Lord. However, I believe there is another, more important reason why the authors of the lectionary have us read it every year. This story of the fearful, ashamed disciples locked away in the upper room is at the heart of what the resurrection means for us all. Radio personality Garrison Keillor once said, "We always have a backstage view of ourselves." We only show to the world what is in front of that stage curtain, what the bright lights and makeup and costumes display to the audience.

But behind the curtain are lots of things we wouldn't dare bring onto the stage, those things we're afraid to reveal because if we do maybe the world and ultimately God would no longer love us. These we keep hidden safely behind the scenes. But the risen Christ walks through our sealed off doors and comes among us bringing us his peace-shalom, bringing us the gift of himself. In the resurrection he releases us from all those things which keep us locked away and hidden. In the resurrection neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor heights, nor depths, nor locked doors, nor abandonment, nor fear,

nor shame, nor grief, nor guilt, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Jesus breaths on us his shalom and we know we are reconciled to God.

The shalom which Jesus offers to his frightened disciples on that first Easter evening and which he offers to us is what The Most Rev. Katherine Jefferts Schori speaks of when she says, "It doesn't just mean the sort of peace that comes when we're no longer at war. It's that rich and multihued vision of a world where no one goes hungry because everyone is invited to a seat at the table, it's a vision of a world where no one is sick or in prison because all sorts of disease have been healed, it is a vision of a world where no one enjoys abundance at the expense of another, it's a vision of a world where all enjoy Sabbath rest in the conscious presence of God. Shalom means that all human beings live together as siblings, at peace with one another and with God, and in right relationship with all of the rest of creation. It is that vision ...where the specter of death no longer holds sway. To say 'shalom' is to know our own place and to invite and affirm the place of all of the rest of creation, once more at home in God."

In his risen presence, Jesus unlocks the doors and sends us back out into the world from which we fled to share his shalom, to help our sisters and brothers shed all that is keeping them from knowing and affirming their own rightful place at God's table. In these fifty great days of Easter, may we celebrate the gift of his presence which the risen Christ brings to us and to all of creation. When we feel totally lost and alone and unworthy of love, may Christ's shalom set us free from all that keeps us locked away in fear and shame. And as we turn to offer a friend or a stranger a sign of God's peace in this service today or beyond these doors in our neighborhoods this week may each one of us be reminded of

the vision of a world where all the beloved people of God are invited to be at home in God and with one another. Amen.