

Apr. 7 Doubting Thomas Sunday Easter 2 2024.

"When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace." — Jimi Hendrix

This is my favorite Sunday of the year. It is the year for the also-ran, for the come-from-behind, for the dark horse, for the unexpected finisher. It is Doubting Thomas Sunday. This is also often called Low Sunday because it is liturgically low and typically has low attendance. People do not expect much the Sunday after Easter. But those of you here know that this is the season of the resurrection, and miracles can and do happen. I am going to address a very challenging and relevant theological topic, one that will need a miracle: peacemaking.

The come-from-behind dark horse in our world is Peace. Will peace be an “also-ran” or will peace upset the powers of greed and darkness? That is one of the questions that Jesus addressed in this wonderful and complex passage. It is the question of faith that we need to consider living in a world at war in Palestine and Ukraine.

We must understand that when Jesus uses the word Peace, it is being drawn from Jewish culture and religion. For Jesus, this is Shalom, not our Greek and Western idea of Peace, which is lack of conflict or lack of motion, or even lack of any signs of life; we often say "rest in Peace" about the deceased. Jewish Shalom is not lack of conflict. It is a relationship of consistent and productive conflict in which both and all parties benefit. Think of the prayers of negotiation of Abraham in the Jewish Scriptures, or the deals that Jacob made with God, promising to tithe if God fulfilled certain demands.

To wish Shalom is to wish prosperity and blessings on the recipients within all the attendant complexities of those blessings. When Jesus

returns to the disciples, who have locked the doors and have hearts that are not at peace, He stands right in the midst of them and says, “Peace Be With You.” How does Peace come to pass? Shalom is a foundational concept in the Hebrew Scriptures. Remember, at the time of this appearance of Jesus, the Christians would still be using only the Hebrew Scriptures. For the Hebrews, Shalom is closer to the meaning of peace found in the sermon on the mount in which Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God.” If you are a peacemaker, you have inherited the traits of your heavenly Father. So how do you “make peace?” I believe that in this passage, Jesus gives us the three things that make for peace, and I call it the peace package.

The first parcel in this package is his mission. Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, so send I you.” This means we heal the sick, feed the hungry, help the poor, love the alien and the refugee. That is peacemaking! But the second part is important. If we do those things, we will need to make peace between hostile parties. For it is conflict between people and nations that causes hunger, homelessness, violence, poverty, and refugees. The second parcel in the peace package is the power to forgive sins, and we are going to need it! It is necessary to forgive to be effective “peacemakers.” As we work together, there will be moments when we will be at odds, not only with the powerful who destroy peace, but with each other. The only group that doesn’t have some clash of ego and agenda is the group that stays in the locked room of doubt. Don’t be afraid to act. The third parcel in the peace package is the giving of the Holy Spirit. We are given the Spirit to empower us as peacemakers to overcome the challenges inherent in this sacred work. The Spirit not only gives us spiritual gifts but also gives us the fruits of the Spirit, including the gifts of love, joy, and inner peace.

Christians, especially in the U.S., see peace as primarily inner peace, which we believe leads to a peaceful disposition and enables us to fulfill our mission as peacemakers in our world. In this passage, Jesus inverts that order. First comes the mission as peacemaker, then repaired relationships through forgiveness, then the deep inner peace which proceeds from the Spirit. We of course cannot neglect the rest of the story. Thomas comes back and doubts the sanity of his fellow disciples. He exclaims that unless he sees Jesus and touches his wounds he will never believe. Thomas then wanders the streets again. Restless and questioning, yet courageous and curious, Thomas does not know what to do. But he does return to the disciples. He gives them another chance, and when he does, Jesus appears right in the midst of them, once again saying, "Peace." Thomas in our passage subsequently exclaims, "My Lord and My God." Jesus becomes the center of his life, and the curiosity which drove him and the courage which sustained him are put to use in the Lord's service.

Calvin said Thomas had not lost faith in Jesus but in the other disciples. Let me ask you this? Is there anybody out there like Thomas? Have you lost faith in your fellow peacemakers? Are you wandering the streets, the news outlets, and the internet sites of doubt trying to make sense of the world? Do you wonder why your heart is roiled up, and you are in the locked room of doubt? The best way to leave that room and regain the freedom of faith is by agreeing to participate in God's mission of peacemaking. If you are ready, Jesus is standing right here at Trinity Presbyterian, right in the midst of us, and we can reach out and touch him, clasp his hand, and pass the peace. We pass the peace every week here; let's commit to doing it daily, not only here at Trinity but in our neighborhood and in the world.