

Christ's Life-Giving and Life-Changing Peace

Sermon by Pastor Patrick Fish
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Easter 3

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

Luke 24:36b-48 (NRSV)

Peace be with you, from Christ, who encounters us exactly where we are at. Who is alive and active even when we don't notice. Amen.

Move 1: "God will save me"

A terrible storm came into a town, and local officials sent out an emergency warning that the riverbanks would soon overflow and flood the nearby homes. They ordered everyone in the town to evacuate immediately.

A faithful and devout Lutheran heard the warning and decided to stay, saying to himself, "I will trust God and if I am in danger, then God will send a divine miracle to save me."

The neighbors came by his house and said to him, "We're leaving and there is room for you in our car, please come with us!" But the man declined. "I have faith that God will save me."

As the man stood on his porch watching the water rise up the steps, a woman in a canoe paddled by and called to him, "Hurry and come into my canoe, the waters are rising quickly!" But the man again said, "No thanks, God will save me."

The floodwaters rose higher, pouring water into his living room and the man had to retreat to the second floor. A police motorboat came by and saw him at the window. "We will come up and rescue you!" they shouted. But the man refused, waving them off saying, "Use your time to save someone else! I have faith that God will save me!"

The flood waters rose higher and higher, and the man had to climb up to his rooftop.

A helicopter spotted him and dropped a rope ladder. A rescue officer came down the ladder and pleaded with the man, "Grab my hand and I will pull you up!" But the man STILL refused, folding his arms tightly to his body. "No thank you! God will save me!"

Shortly after, the floodwaters swept the man away.

When in heaven, the man stood before God and asked, "I put all of my faith in you. Why didn't you come and save me?"

And God said, "My child, I sent you a warning. I sent you a car. I sent you a canoe. I sent you a motorboat. I sent you a helicopter. What more were you looking for?"

Move 2: Christ meets us and sees us first

Of course, this is just a made-up story. But it sheds light on something

important. Something that I think is true of a lot of us: All of us at some points in our lives, or maybe right now, struggle to see God in our lives.

We struggle to see God at work. To see God's activity. To hear Jesus calling out to us.

We get caught. Clouded. Stuck. Stressed. And what happens?

We become unglued. Our narrative becomes centered on self, and our lives are directed by things of this world. Our language becomes doubt, division, fear and failure.

Hear Christ say to you today: "Peace be with you." Christ wants you. He wants you to see him. To experience him. To encounter him.

But Jesus knows before he can do that, he must meet each of us first. He always sees us before we see him. And he doesn't just see the masked self. He sees the whole self. All of me. All of you.

Jesus acknowledges the hurt you bring today. He acknowledges the struggle you have in the depths of your soul. The real stuff you don't want to share when people ask how you are doing.

Christ acknowledges that. Not in some superficial way. No, Jesus—the real Christ, the pierced and scarred Savior, our risen and alive Christ—meets us in the flesh and bone.

And wants to replace our pains with promise. He wants to turn our hurts into hope. Move us from fear to faith.

As Jesus met the disciples on the road, he continues to meet us today. Speaking specific words we need to hear.

Mary Magdalene needed to hear her name to believe. Peter needed to receive forgiveness to believe. Thomas needed to touch Jesus' wounds to believe. Paul needed to be blinded by Christ's light to believe. Jesus met all of them where they were.

Jesus is speaking that word you need to hear today. And he offers you peace. A peace that interrupts everything. A peace that speaks to your very soul.

Jesus offer a peace that has before and does presently change us.
Changes our narrative. Changes our lifestyle. Changes our language.

When we encounter Jesus' grace, we become people centered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

When we encounter Jesus' love, our lives are about following and bringing God's Kingdom here and now.

When we encounter the peace of Christ, our language changes to forgiveness and love to all nations. No exceptions.

Move 3: A new beginning

Our Gospel on this third Sunday of Easter is the story of Jesus meeting the disciples post-crucifixion, death, and resurrection.

The disciples and their companions are processing Mary's encounter of the empty tomb. Peter's need to see the empty tomb for himself. Jesus meeting Cleopas and his wife on the road.

They are distraught. Grieving their friend. And now they are confused. "What do we do now? What does this all mean?"

They are in the midst of this conversation when Jesus approaches them. Jesus sees their worries. Meets them in all of it. And says to them, "Peace be with you."

And they are motionless. Speechless. "Is this is a ghost?" I mean, dead people are supposed to stay dead. Their faces are completely horrified.

I relate this to the face my daughter Ellie makes when she thinks she's holding onto mommy or daddy, but after looking up, realizes this person is not her parent. There's an initial moment of shock. And then, immediately, terror sets in. Fear takes over. The tears start streaming down her face.

That's how the disciples are feeling. "Who is this person that's encountered us on the road?"

Jesus acknowledges their doubts. Their fears. Their questions. He doesn't condemn them. He affirms them. Meets them in it. Tells them to look at his hands. Look at his feet. "See that it is I. Touch me and see."

Notice here that Jesus isn't some shining, sparkly version of himself. He is not some spiritual entity dressed in white floating around. No, he has scars. His side is still pierced. His feet and hands still have wounds from the nails.

There is an emphasis by Jesus to convince and explain to his disciples his physical resurrected self. He has them touch his wounds. He eats with them.

And, now, he is standing amongst them. Fully alive. As the same real, physical, flesh-and-bone Christ.

Offering them peace in the face of death. Opening their eyes to see that Jesus has accomplished God's plan. He is the fulfillment. He has done it. He has done what we never could have.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus all point to what God wanted for us and creation all along. Jesus reveals that to the disciples then, and to us now.

Our past. The world's past. Our mistakes. Our missteps. Our sin. Our shame. It's all been taken care of. Not by what we did or didn't do. But by what Jesus did. By what the Messiah did.

For creation to have a new beginning. For you and I to have new life. Not in some future place. But right here. Right now. In this present life.

Move 4: We are witnesses

This is Good News. My hope is that Jesus' words today give you peace. Peace that passes all understanding. Peace that penetrates from your mind to your heart. Peace that propels you forward to be a witness, not in some future, far-off time. We are witnesses together in the present.

The last verse of our Gospel is something I think we like to glance over. But it's tied together with Jesus' whole encounter.

After Jesus has encountered the disciples. After he's eaten with them and explained who he is and what he's done. Before he exits. Jesus commissions the disciples to continue his work, to continue his mission.

He says, "You are witnesses of these things."

You *are*. Not you *will be*. Not *when you have time*. Not you *could*. Not the elected. *You*, plural. Ya'll. Ya'll are witnesses of these things.

Being a witness. As Karoline Lewis states, it's not a choice. It's not a decision we make. It's a faithful response from the faith we receive. It's who we are. It's a state of being. A lifestyle. A calling not just of the few but of all of us.¹

Many people are waiting for that big moment. For that big divine miracle. But we know that the big moment has already happened. The Empty Tomb *is* that moment. It's *our* moment. The moment that changed not just one nation or one people but all nations and all people.²

We don't just proclaim that; we live into that truth. Into that life centered on forgiveness by being witnesses.

You are witnesses by telling others how God has specifically spoken to you. By being the canoe. By being the boat. By being the helicopter. By being flesh-and-bone presence here on earth to people who are hurting. To people who are feeling hopeless.

By living uncommonly. By living differently from this world. By living with the courage of kindness. By living with love. By living with mercy.

By living in a way that reflects the real and alive, pierced and scarred, life of our Risen Savior, Jesus.

Amen.

1. Karoline Lewis, "We are witnesses," workingpreacher.org, April 15, 2018

2. Karoline Lewis, "We are witnesses," workingpreacher.org, April 15, 2018

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