

Year B Easter 3 2024 Peace Be With You Luke 24 vv36b to 48

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and a few other women, have rushed back from the tomb on Easter morning to tell the disciples the amazing news that Jesus has risen from the dead. The men, however, do not believe them. Peter goes to see for himself that the tomb is empty and heads home. Later that same evening, two disciples burst into the midst of the gathered disciples to excitedly tell them they've seen the risen Christ and have hurried back to Jerusalem all the way from Emmaus to tell them so. Apparently, Jesus has also, in the meantime, appeared to Peter. As the gathering is trying to digest all of this shocking, hard to believe news, Jesus himself is suddenly among them.

His first words are, "Peace be with you." The last words we hear from Jesus today are, "You are witnesses of these things." Peace be with you...You are witnesses. These two phrases are connected and they are very important – not just to those disciples who heard Jesus speak those words back then but they are important to us, Jesus' disciples who hear him speak those words today. How are they connected? Why are they so important? Let's join the disciples gathered around Jesus that first Easter evening and find out.

Peace be with you. Jesus probably said this to them in Aramaic: *Shlama lah* or possibly in Greek (it was certainly written in Greek): *eirene hymin*. Whichever way you say it, it means the same thing. Peace – *eirene* – the all-encompassing, health and well-being of body and mind. It comes from the word *eiro* which means to join, tie together, make whole...the wholeness that comes when all essential parts are joined together. The wholeness that comes when all essential parts are joined together. So, Jesus' greeting of "Peace" wasn't just a hello, it wasn't just a calm

down, don't be scared, sort of thing. It was the amazing gift of God's wholeness. This peace, this wholeness, as we talked about last week, can only be given by God. Despite Jesus' words of reassurance, the disciples are stirred up, agitated, and a shocked debate starts up: Is that a ghost? It must be a ghost. He can't be real. Can he be real? This is totally understandable, isn't it? They saw his murder. They saw his dead body being carried away to the tomb. Jesus then shows them his wounds and says, "Touch me – I'm not a ghost. I'm flesh and bone just like you." Notice that we don't know if any of them actually took him up on the offer and were brave enough to touch him. They were filled with joy and amazement but they still did not believe that it was really him and that he was really there in the flesh. Jesus wants to totally get rid of their doubts so he says, "Well, have you got anything to eat?" And he eats a piece of broiled fish. There, look, I'm eating. Ghosts don't eat. It's really me and I'm really alive.

Now that he's finally got them calm, he gets down to business. He explains to them what his death and resurrection have accomplished and it's all toward the fulfillment of God's purpose. He points out that God's plan for salvation is laid out in the scriptures and what he has just gone through is for our salvation. Now, here's the interesting thing about the word salvation that I shared with the Advisory Board last week. Salvation actually means a whole lot more and maybe even something different from what you might think it means. Salvation means rescue, deliverance from harm *and* it means healing and wholeness. If that's sounding a little familiar, you're not imagining things. That's what I told you that the word peace means: the all-encompassing, health and well-being of body and mind, the wholeness that comes when all essential parts are joined together. God rescues us from the thinking and behaving of the world that is so dominant around us: everyone for

themselves, the more you have the better you are. God rescues us from the power of pocketbook, property, and position, and leads us into the wholeness found in the power of love, generosity, compassion, and forgiveness.

We already are given the way into that wholeness through baptism because it is in the mystery of baptism that we participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Just as Jesus died and was resurrected to new life so, too, are we – through the water of baptism we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, and given new life in God’s kingdom. Jesus makes it clear that it’s a flesh and bone kind of new life, it’s an “I can eat dinner with you” kind of new life. It’s not a spiritual body in the afterlife kind of new life. It is a “touch me, see my scars” kind of new life. It is our life. And it is now. As churchgoers, perhaps you’ve heard it said that death is not the end of our story. Well, death and going to heaven is not the end of our story either. It’s “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven” that our story is headed towards. Wholeness on earth as in heaven.

You, perhaps, don’t feel very whole. Everyone has worries and fears and troubles. Everyone is lacking in generosity and kindness sometimes. Becoming whole is a process, becoming more and more like Christ is a journey. That is one of the big reasons why coming together to worship regularly is so important. It is our worship together that is our dress rehearsal for the perfection of God’s kingdom. We experience it here and then we carry it out into the world. Loving God and loving our neighbour are not always easy. James K. A. Smith tells us that love takes practice. Worship is our gymnasium ([James K.A. Smith on "Liturgical Discipleship" - Emerging Scholars Blog](#)). We practice generosity when we put what we can on the offering plate, we practice hospitality when we share fellowship here and afterward over coffee. We practice sharing the peace of Christ, of being Christ for others and

seeing Christ in others when turn to our neighbours and breathe the words, “Peace be with you.” We practice being the one body of Christ together in the world when we join in sharing the body of Christ at God’s table.

It’s not just all about us though. Peace is the wholeness experienced when all the essential parts are joined together. It is not enough that we have a one-on-one relationship with God. We are also in relationship with one another and we are in relationship with the earth. All the essential parts are joined together. There was a popular slogan a while back to guide people as they went out hiking and canoeing and other activities to enjoy the great outdoors. Leave it better than you found it was the slogan. Leave it better than you found it. That is the task, the responsibility laid on us as followers of Christ. Leave the world better than you found it. We’re not just passing through this world. We’re not just tolerating this life as we await life with God after death. Leave it better because we’ll be back. On the Day of the Lord, at the general resurrection...we’ll be back. Leave it better, Jesus tells us. Proclaim the good news – the kingdom of God has come near, Jesus opened the door for us, repent, enter into the kingdom, live the kingdom life and spread the fullness of the kingdom throughout the world for you are witnesses Jesus says. You are witnesses. Your lives and your words are the sign to others that God’s kingdom is here. The peace, the wholeness within you, that we nurture and grow here through worship, through prayer, through scripture study, through works of justice, the peace of God that you show to the world – that is your testimony.

Peace be with you – you are witnesses.