

John's gospel gives us the best accounts of Our Lord's appearances to his disciples after his resurrection. Last week, we read about how Jesus came and stood among them in that house with the doors locked. They were disoriented and afraid, until he showed them his hands and his side, and they rejoiced. We have the same story in Luke 24.

Jesus says, "Peace be with you." In fact, in just eight verses last week, Jesus says "Peace be with you" to his disciples three times. We didn't discuss this then, so that is how I would like to start today.

Peace is an important concept for us. Every service, we say, "The peace of the Lord be always with you." And, from Paul, "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding. . ." And we say, "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." So what is Christian peace? We need to know this.

In international affairs, we know that peace is the absence of war. In family affairs, we know that peace happens when we get through Thanksgiving dinner without an outbreak of open hostility, at least at the table. But Christian peace means more than just not fighting or quarreling. It is a state of spiritual being, a kind of calmness and serenity that lets us live with poise and dignity and charity and grace.

In John ch 14, Jesus says to his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. . . Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." It almost sounds as if this kind of peace is a soporific, an inducement to passive acceptance or complacency. Actually, it is just the opposite--it is empowering. It grants us courage to do God's will.

When I was ordained priest, we still used the 1928 Prayer Book. I like to look up my ordination vows every now and again, just to remind myself what it was I swore to. One of those vows goes:

Bishop: "Will you maintain and set forwards, as much as lieth in you, quietness, peace, and love. . . ?" Answer: "I will do so, the Lord being my helper." Actually, that is a pretty good vow, not just for clergy but for all Christians: Will you maintain and set forwards, as much as lieth in you, quietness, peace, and love? Answer: I will do so, the Lord being my helper.

How do we get to God's peace? From the horrors we are witnessing now, it would appear there is a time coming that will be very divisive, a time that will make the divisiveness we have seen so far seem like a Sunday in the park in Paris. Being at peace at such a time of naked hostility will be difficult. It will also be essential. So how do we find God's peace?

First, we will need a purpose. One reason the disciples were afraid and disoriented and confused after the crucifixion was their purpose seemed lost. The great mission they had given up everything to take on, and that gave their lives meaning, had been destroyed. Jesus recognized this loss, and that he had to restore a sense of purpose. So he said to them, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you," and he gave them a new mission. This morning he says, "Follow me." That is, do what I have done.

We all need a mission, a point to our lives, something to commit ourselves to. But it is also the case that God's peace cannot be gotten just by seeking it. It is not entirely achieved; it is also conferred. It is freely given, there waiting for us to receive it. Which brings us to this morning's gospel.

God's peace comes from feeling His love for us. The disciples feel that love when the risen Jesus appears to them for the third time. This time, they are fishing and having no luck at it. It is early morning when Jesus appears and tells them where to cast the net. As in the miraculous catch of fish from Luke ch 5(1-11), they catch almost too many.

When they get ashore, Jesus asks them to bring some of the fish and have breakfast with him, which they did. I love that. That was when they knew it was the Lord, when He had breakfast with them; that is who our Lord is.

Notice, the disciples were not deserving of God's love. From Matt 26 and Mark 14, we know that when Jesus needed them, "all the disciples deserted him and fled." The whole point of the Bible is that God's love is not something we deserve; it is just always there waiting for us. God keeps coming back for us and back for us, the way Jesus did for the disciples.

How we experience God's love, how He makes a resurrection appearance to us, is very personal. I have a younger brother who is 69. He has been severely retarded since birth. He has the same mental capacity and understanding and speech skills as a Labrador retriever. One year he had a murderous toothache, so bad he hit his head against the cinder block wall to make it stop, until he was unconscious.

No one knew which tooth it was that hurt, so he had all his teeth taken out. He is not pretty to look at. He lives in a home in Faribault MN, where I visit him twice a year. He is the sweetest, gentlest soul I have ever known.

Two years ago, I took him again to the A&W, which he loves. He was having an enormous sundae--he can only eat soft food--with much of it ending up on his sweatshirt. I was talking to him--he had no idea what about--and patting him and stroking his hair.

All of a sudden he laughed. I don't think I ever saw him laugh before, in all those years. We will never know what it was he thought was funny. But something in that moment made him happy enough to laugh.

God be praised. Love your neighbor. Amen.