

“Peace Be With You:” Luke 24: 36-53

By Amanda A. Nevin 4-19-15

When you hear the word Peace or Shalom, what comes to mind? Is it (show images) an absence of war, a sense of calm, everyone getting along, serenity, absence of conflict.

In the final verses of Luke’s Gospel account of Easter, the Risen Christ appears to the gathered disciples on that first Easter evening. The disciples are gathered together, presumably in the upper room where they had shared the Last Supper with Christ chatting about the day’s events when Jesus suddenly appears among them. The appearance of Jesus was startling. Jesus greets the disciples who were probably discussing the women who went to the tomb and found it empty and the two men’s encounter with Christ on the road to Emmaus. The first word to the startled disciples is a word of Peace/Shalom. In Luke’s gospel “shalom or peace” takes on a deeper meaning not only that of wellness now that of “salvation.” So when Jesus says “shalom” to these disciples after the resurrection he is not only pouring a greeting of blessing/peace/well-being wholeness on a people he is now offering the hope of salvation which he had been instructing the disciples about for three years. But the disciples are frightened, they are startled and confused.

Why were the disciples so afraid? Maybe they were afraid that their eyes were deceiving them, afraid that Christ was a ghost, afraid of those who might harm them for following Jesus, afraid that they had wasted three years of their life to follow a lie; or that the resurrection was made up, or that that they had given their life to follow someone who now is gone and the future is unknown. We are a people who are often driven by fear: fear of failure, fear of our inadequacies, of rejection; of scarcity. All we have to do is hear the political rhetoric around us; fear of the unknown, the stranger, the immigrant, the church against the threats of secularism; fear of those who think differently than ourselves, of those with different political persuasion; of those who look different than me; of those who practice a different religion; fear that God doesn’t really love me, a sinner because if He only knew what I was about- surely he couldn’t love me. We are afraid that Christ isn’t really risen, that God is not all powerful, all knowing, all loving, that God is not Lord; that history has somehow slipped out of God’s hands and we are now left to figure out this thing called life on our own, sure we believe but with some mode of fear that God isn’t all powerful enough to conqueror the evils of this world. St Augustine believed that our most fundamental identity and life behavior is a function of what we love (pg. 193 Prayer, by Thomas Keller). The more we worship the things of this world (desires for more money, power, acclaim), the more we put our stock in who we are as individuals in the accolades, promotions, good wishes from the people of this world, the more we try to secure everything and make everything pretty and neat and worry fear, the more we live in fear and less in gratitude and trust of our heavenly Father. The more we focus on the worlds understanding of security and hope the more we are living the illusion that we are spiritually

self-sufficient and God is a part of our life, but not the center (pg. 196 Prayer, Thomas Keller). We don't like the idea that we are utterly dependent on God. The disciples had been dependent upon God for three years and now they were standing there feeling abandoned, afraid, questioning, wondering what the future may hold.

But Jesus declares to them "peace, shalom be with you." But the disciples remain afraid. Jesus responds to them, why are you frightened and why do doubts arise in your heart?" Jesus then offers his body for examination and then eats fish in their presence to show that he is living! Jesus offers two proofs of evidence to his resurrected existence, that he isn't just some spirit or ghost- he is fully bodily resurrected. Jesus is alive beyond the grave, fully human, saying "hey it is me!" He offers his body as the first source of evidence- see my hands, my body, my flesh, my wounds, they are real and then he offers a second source of proof of his existence: he eats, after all a ghost can't eat! The disciples need to see and witness these two actions of Jesus to begin to believe that Christ is not a mere apparition but a bodily resurrected man whom they knew and loved, worshiped and learned from, the one who they watched die on the cross and be put in the tomb. He is now among them as the living Lord. They have joy but still disbelieve. Christ then goes into detail weaving together the story of God's people from Abraham to the prophets and connects them to his own story of salvation and hope. Everything that was written about Christ in the law of Moses, and the prophets and the psalms were fulfilled in Jesus Christ the one standing before them and us!

We are reminded of the consistent faithfulness of God- all that was done and prophesied about is now complete in Christ and the story now moves forward with our Messiah. The risen Christ was the one who opened their minds to understand everything and their job now was to go out and preach this message. The risen Christ is the Jesus who died and is the one who stood before them. Jesus shows them his wounds, reminding them and us that the Risen Lord is always the crucified Lord who conquers death and completes salvation. Our Easter hope today is that Christ is still Lord, Christ is still in control, is still present among his creation. So when we hear the words "Peace be with you" it is a peace that is supposed to be deep down in our souls.

Easter is the belief that Jesus was and is God among us and all those who would argue today that Jesus is just a good guy, or all we really need to know from Jesus are the principles from the "Sermon on the Mount" are missing the point. Without faith in the spectacular event of Christ's death and resurrection, without faith in the resurrected Christ standing in their midst as a human (not just a spirit); without faith that the scriptures had been fulfilled in their presence, the disciple would not have bothered to pass the Sermon on the Mount and all of Jesus' teachings along to the next generation and others from generation to generation. The Christian story would not have become the life changing story that it was if it was believed that Jesus was

just a good guy; without faith in Christ being Lord it is unlikely that anyone would have remembered Jesus more fully and more completely and in such detail as the scriptures provide. What these disciples saw, what they reported, what was written in the Gospels is shared with us because they were convinced that the teacher was and is God, God with us till the end of the age; that the one who stood before them announcing peace and showing them his scars and eating a meal with them was the promised Messiah. From this we gain our confidence our peace because Christ is the Lord like Kent preached last week. Our peace dwells deep within our souls because Christ is the fulfillment of the scriptures.

What does peace be with you mean? When Christ appeared before those disciples his simple words “peace be with you” challenged them to be different, to think differently, to see him (Jesus) for who he is. Jesus’ breaking bread with them, teaching them the scriptures and charging them to go out, challenged them to live differently, to be filled with peace, to live as people of the resurrection. To live in the confidence that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39). Peace be with you means that we know deep down in our souls that when life is crazy, life is messy, life is tragic, life is hard that God himself is for us and that not even in death itself can separate us from our creator. Peace within us is the quiet confidence that Christ is who he says he is, that Christ is the one who stood before the disciples long ago and is the one who stands before us today pursuing us, loving us, walking with us, caring for us in our joys and in our deep sorrows. Peace/Shalom with in us is our entire being filled with the grace of Jesus Christ and knowing that you are loved by an amazing God who walks with us in all aspects of our life. But when we live out of our fear: striving for more; putting up walls and fortresses in our hearts, our properties, our lives; when we allow stereotypes to guide our decision making our beliefs about others; when we allow our ignorance to dictate what we feel and believe; when we allow the fear of others to become the source of our hatred; when we allow the fear of failure to push us to do unethical things; when we allow our fear of scarcity to drive us to make choices that put others at risk; when we allow personal injustices to become a driving force for getting even or revenge—we are not living with Christ as the source of our hope and Peace. Only when we come empty handed, humbled in spirit and admit our fears, our failures and invite the resurrected Christ to come in and do a new thing in us, can we learn the true meaning of Shalom/peace be with you. Only then do we know the blessing of Christ’s message of peace to his disciples and to us to be with us no matter what.

In the song “Relentless” by Hillsong: Some of the words are: “redemptions bid is unrelenting, your love goes on, you carry us, you cover us with your endless grace, your love is relentless, your loves is relentless. Tearing through the veil of darkness, breaking every chain you set us free, fighting for the furthest heart you gave your life to set us free.” Christ’s love is relentless,

he loves us so much that he will not abandon us or leave us, in our joys in our sorrows, if you trust that at the core of who you are, then when the waves come crashing over, and life is overwhelming we can still find peace.