

Easter 2C
John 20:19-31
April 27, 2025

“The Promise of Peace”
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As God has sent me, so I send you.” ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” ²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” ²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Greeting people at the door after Easter services, Pastor Jane was delighted to shake hands with “Seldom-Seen” Steve, and even more delighted when he complimented her on her sermon and said service was “amazing.” Faced with such evidence of faithfulness, she asked why he didn’t come to church more often. “I’m just following the Lord’s example,” he said. “If Christ can rise up early only one Sunday a year, that’s good enough for me, too!”¹

It is good to greet folks at Easter service or on any Sunday, for that matter, but there’s something special about holidays and something really hopeful about seeing the Sanctuary as full as it was last week here at New England Church. Typically, we have a brief time of greeting neighbors after the announcements. But have you ever been to a church that *passes the peace*? I’ve served two different congregations where the passing of the peace lasted for several minutes and some people made it their mission to greet every single person in the room!

One study showed that prior to the pandemic 89% of guests were uncomfortable with such rituals. The same researcher estimates that post-pandemic, less than 4% of churches have retained the practice.² We have a pared down version here—a time to greet neighbors without making guests feel too uncomfortable, I hope. We know that the friendliness of a church isn’t best measured by the length of time spent in worship greeting friends, but by the welcome we share with guests before and after the service.

In our text from John’s gospel, when Jesus entered the room with a greeting of peace, he wasn’t just being friendly. While a week has gone by for us since Easter Sunday, our text picks up on that very day. Peter and the beloved disciple had seen the empty tomb and Mary Magdalene

¹ Stewardshipoflife.com: <https://www.stewardshipoflife.org/jokes/>.

² Thom S. Rainer. “How the Stand and Greet Time Disappeared in Churches (And How to Replace It),” ChurchAnswers.com, January 17, 2022: [https://churchanswers.com/blog/how-the-stand-and-greet-time-disappeared-in-churches-and-how-to-replace-it/#:~:text=Our%20studies%20showed%20very%20few,for%20most%20guests%20\(89%25\)](https://churchanswers.com/blog/how-the-stand-and-greet-time-disappeared-in-churches-and-how-to-replace-it/#:~:text=Our%20studies%20showed%20very%20few,for%20most%20guests%20(89%25).).

had testified to the risen Christ, but the disciples, all except Thomas, were huddled in a dark room behind locked doors on Easter evening. They were on edge. They were frightened. Jesus' greeting cut through the charged silence like a knife. "Peace be with you." I bet they jumped out of their skins! After showing them his wounds, Jesus spoke again, "Peace be with you. As God has sent me, so I send you."

Jesus' greeting of peace was more than an anemic greeting; more than the peace normally exchanged by church folk during worship; and more than the fragile peace negotiated, or evaded, by warring nations. But the disciples already knew that, or should have. Just a few chapters before, Jesus told them: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."³

They already knew that Jesus' peace was different than status quo peace in first century Palestine—the peace of the Roman Empire, peace through military might and subjugation. He certainly wasn't referring to the peace of death, or a state of euphoria, or the absence of conflict.

When Jesus talked about peace, he was talking about something deeper, more solid, more fundamental—something like the "power to hold the wildest fear in pause, to still a clamor or hush a cry."⁴ He was talking about the kind of peace that, no matter what, can still sing, "it is well, it is well with my soul." Jesus' peace doesn't protect us *from* danger. It holds us *during* danger. Jesus' peace doesn't isolate people in locked rooms; it reconnects them to community. It doesn't numb one to the pain of grief and loss; it awakens them to gratitude for life. The disciples knew this—*should* have known this. But there they were, huddled in a dark room on the evening of Easter Sunday, scared out of their wits. So Jesus said it again, "Peace be with you. As God has sent me, so I send you."

³ John 14:27, NRSV.

⁴ "John 14:27 Meaning," Kingjamesbibleonline.org: https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/John-14-27_meaning/.

Jesus' peace sends us forth from the locked room and back into the world—not to avoid the brokenness, but to carry healing and compassion, justice, and love. In bestowing his peace upon the disciples, Jesus shows that it's a gift. But in sending them forth, he makes it clear that living out of that peace, connecting to that peace, and connecting that peace to others and the world, is hard work.

So, how do *we* go forth into the world in the spirit of Jesus' peace to carry healing and compassion, justice and love to all who need it? First, we have to experience that peace for ourselves. To do so, we might consider practicing intentional stillness and silence, spend time in prayer or meditation, engage in acts of compassion and justice, and stay connected to our spiritual community—to others also trying to embody that same peace in themselves, for the sake of the world. The promise of peace is for all and the work of peace is one to which we are all called.

Dear friends, hear Jesus' words just once more: "Peace be with you." These words are not a suggestion nor are they a wish. They are a declaration. May we go forth, not in fear, but in peace. And may the peace within transform the world without. Amen.