

2 Easter B  
“Peace to Y’all”

April 7, 2024  
John 20:19-31

Three times in our gospel reading Jesus says, “Peace to you.” The phrase is only two words in Greek: a word that means “peace,” and a word that means “you.” The “you” is plural: “y’all” and it’s an indirect objection: “Peace to y’all” or “Peace with y’all.”

The Greek doesn’t have a verb. Many translators, like ours, add “be”: “Peace **be** with you.” That makes it sound like a wish: “May peace be with you.” “I hope you have peace with one another.” However, most often when Greek or Hebrew doesn’t have a verb, translators use the indicative form of “to be”: “Peace **is** with you.”

Jesus could be making a declaration: “Peace is yours.”

A key meaning of the Greek word for “peace” is about human relationships. Its primary meaning is: not at war with others; not fighting with one another. This can apply to nations not being at war with each other or to individuals not fighting or arguing or disputing with each other.

The first time Jesus appeared to the disciples Thomas wasn’t with them. When he did rejoin them during the week, the text literally says, “They kept telling him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’” Thomas doesn’t believe them. We aren’t told how many times they tried to convince Thomas that Christ was risen, but it was more than once. Every time he refused to believe them. He didn’t trust the words and experience of the other disciples. It would be easy for that to escalate into shouting and anger and stomping off never to return.

It wasn’t just God’s word he didn’t believe, but the word and experience of his friends. How do they keep a harmonious, peaceful relationship with a non-trusting friend? It would be nice if they had told us how they did that so that we could apply it in our families and our congregations! Occasionally, family members have disagreements. Occasionally, church members can have disagreements. We can say and do things that causes rifts in our relationships.

We can see a few things in this text that they did. First of all, they didn’t kick Thomas out of the fellowship. They didn’t tell him, “Since you don’t believe us, we want nothing more to do with you. Leave and never return.”

Secondly, whatever disagreements Thomas may have had with the other ten, he stayed with the group. He didn’t think, “You’re all crazy,” and go home. Thomas was with the disciples a week later – perhaps enduring an entire week of arguing about whether or not Christ was really raised from the dead and appeared to them – or a week of silent tension among the eleven. They didn’t give up on each other. Something about Jesus’ presence in their lives had the ten loving Thomas even when he didn’t trust them. Something about being with the group kept Thomas returning to them even when he disagreed with them. Their unity in Christ held them together more strongly than their differences and disagreement. Eventually, Thomas had his own experience with the risen Jesus – as part of the group of disciples. He also makes a personal confession that we didn’t hear from the other disciples. There will be more about that in the adult class following the service.

Jesus told them after washing their feet that the world will know that they are his disciples by the way they love one another. This doesn’t mean that they would never have disagreements, but that they are to find ways to continue to love one another even with

disagreements. Differences don't have to lead to animosity and divisions. A divorce doesn't have to result in the couple being enemies to each other.

A friend, who had been in politics, makes a helpful distinction between opponents and enemies. Opponents can be lawyers in a courtroom or athletes on the field or court; but they can also be and often are friends outside of the competition. They are not enemies, just opponents during the trial or game.

Our first reading begins by saying that the community of believers was one in heart and mind. They were so connected to each other that everyone sold their land and houses and possessions so that there would no needy people among the believers. They lived communally. They shared everything. That's the ideal picture we are given in Acts chapter 4. The ideal picture starts falling apart in chapter 5. A couple lies about what they sold their property for so that they might keep some of the money for themselves. Acts chapter 6 tells about complaints about the way the funds are distributed – some felt that they weren't getting their proper share. In good church fashion, they formed a committee to look into and try and solve the problem.

It didn't take long at all in the early church for the sharing of property and wealth caused problems. It undermined the peace Jesus said we are to have with one another. It didn't work well then, so it probably wouldn't work well today either.

However, I have often seen such sharing and concern and taking care of needs occur in families. An adult child loses a job and parents provide for him; or parents run into financial difficulties and a child sends money. Siblings help each other when there are needs. We know how to help one another in times of need. Even within congregations, members help one another – often quietly and without fanfare.

Together, you pool your resources so that we have this beautiful building, so that you might call a wonderful pastor, so that you can carry out the many ministries of this congregation.

For members of the early church, they often lost their family support when they converted to Christianity. Fellow believers became their brothers and sisters. God was **our** Father. We were, and we are, one family. We are to have peace with one another.

Earlier in John Jesus told his disciples: "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."<sup>1</sup> Whatever this peace is that Jesus gives, it's different from the peace we might receive from the world. It's not a peace imposed by fear of punishment should we break a law. It's a peace that comes from hearts and lives that have been changed by Jesus.

A little later Jesus again talks about peace: "I have said this to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution, but take courage: I have conquered the world!"<sup>2</sup>

This peace Jesus gives does not promise us a life without distress or problems. Even among believers, they sometimes had problems with each other. Those early followers certainly had troubles with the world. However, we have been given something more important than any petty disagreements we might have with one another. We are to forgive one another

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<sup>1</sup> John 14:27

<sup>2</sup> John 16:33

as Christ has forgiven us. That means not holding resentments. It means not trying to get even. Forgiveness brings peace to our own lives.

We are to love one another as Christ has loved us. We are to be in mission together because Christ has sent us out into the unbelieving world. We have Christ as our example who sacrificed his own life for the sake of others. We are to let our lives together be a witness to the world that we are followers of Jesus.

“Peace to y’all” is what Jesus declares to us. It happens among us. I’ve seen it and commented on it within this congregation. The peace Jesus gives us – the peace of God that exceeds all understanding<sup>3</sup> - isn’t just for us, but it’s what we invite others to come into with us. Among the discord and anger and hostility that happens out in the world, we gather together as the children of God, brothers and sisters to one another, forgiven, loved, accepted, by our heavenly Father. This Triune God is the source of our unity and peace with one another. We can disagree with one another, and still, not only be friends, but brothers and sisters in Christ; children of the same heavenly Father. Peace is ours. Jesus said it. We believe it and then live it.

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<sup>3</sup> Philippians 4:7