

# ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως: Easter 3-B (11 April 2021)

St. Thomas', Glassboro

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*Time-stamp: <2021-04-17 Sat 17:00>*

## **Collect**

O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

*Acts 3:12-19, 1 John 3:1-7, Luke 24:36b-48, Psalm 4*

## **1 Beginning: Once upon a time...**

“Jesus himself stood among [his disciples] and said to them, “Peace be with you.”<sup>1</sup> *In nomine patris...*

This weekend, my oldest child had her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Technically, I don't suppose I should even call her a child any more! It is both heart-breaking to think of her moving away, making a life on her own, and I am filled with gratitude that she has made it this far. I'm a little terrified to think of her plans to live away at college, away from Becky and me, in just a few months. And I'm living in joyful anticipation of seeing what she does next. There's nothing like raising children to help one to experience a full range of human emotions, many of them right at the same time!

I suppose this is what the disciples were feeling, with both a good deal more terror and a lot more surprise as well. The disciples had been told Jesus was alive, though they dismissed the reports as utterly unbelievable. There may have been more than a hint of sexism when they dismissed the women's reports. Peter himself had run and seen the empty tomb. But still, there were many more plausible explanations for an empty tomb than resurrection. That Jesus would be alive was simply unthinkable.

## **2 The Context of the Resurrection**

What was the context of all these unbelievable reports?

Three days ago Jesus washed the disciples' feet, their teacher acting like their servant. That was awkward!

Three days ago, Jesus took his disciples to a garden to pray, late at night. The hour was late and the intensity of Jesus' grief was exhausting. It was confusing: what could possibly be so upsetting?

Three days ago a lynch mob gathered to arrest Jesus – led by one of Jesus' own inner circle of twelve. Imagine the shock, the sense of betrayal and despair not just by Jesus, but by all the disciples!

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<sup>1</sup>Luke 24.36b NRSV

Three days ago an angry, excited mob with torches and clubs and swords surrounded Jesus. A mix of government-sponsored thugs and actual authorities appeared and there was violence in the offing. The Prince of Peace was subjected to extraordinary rendition in the middle of night.

Three days ago Jesus' friends abandoned him. They ran away into the dark and hid.

Two days ago someone recognized one of the disciples and pointed him out as a friend of Jesus, that so-called disciple swore up and down that she was mistaken; he denied even knowing who Jesus was.

Two days ago Jesus was subjected to a sham trial, in the middle of the night. None of the charges against Jesus were true; most of them didn't even make sense! But the authorities were sure Jesus was guilty of *something*: he had a record. He was a Jew. The charges anyway weren't the point. Intimidation and control were the point.

Two days ago Jesus was mocked, spat upon, and struck. His body was bruised and whipped and violated. His captors strove to tear away, to deny his human dignity, that image of God which every person bears. Jesus was not a person to them: just a body to be treated roughly and uncaringly.

Two days ago, as a Jew, as a member of a racialized community, Jesus was subject to particularly harsh treatment by the government. A Roman citizen would receive a fair trial, would have a lawyer and a right of appeal, all the way to the supreme court. A Roman person would never be crucified except under the most extreme circumstances. But Jews were considered expendable, not worthy of all the same rights and affordances and protections as Romans. On some days the roads into town would be lined with crosses peopled with Jews, dying as a warning to other Jews to stay in their place and not to get too uppity. Jesus was on one of those crosses.

Two days ago, Jesus was whipped, stripped of his clothes, and hung on a tree to die.

Death is a permanent condition.

Or so the disciples believed. So anyone would believe. Who could believe otherwise?

### **3 Jesus Appears**

But today, Jesus is here once more among his friends. Jesus is alive. The disciples' hearts are full of longing, pain, joy, guilt, and terror. They are still in shock from what happened two days ago, and now their shock is compounded by the utterly unexpected, completely impossible events of today.

What does Jesus say? What are his first words? "Peace be with you." "Peace be with you."

In Jesus' mother tongue, he said "Shalom aleichem" or "Shalom l'chon." Jesus is like a parent holding their baby and saying, "Shhh, it's OK. Shalom aleichem. Shhh, it's OK." You've just been through something traumatic, life is cruel and wrong and painful sometimes, but "shhhh, it's OK: I have you now. Peace be with you, Shalom aleichem." Jesus is comforting his disciples as they face up to both the joy and possibilities, and also the pain and the difficulties, of life after the passion.

Eyes and news cycles right now are concerned with the horrors in Minneapolis, Chicago, Atlanta, and Indianapolis. Police officers face charges in the deaths of George Floyd, Daunte Wright, and Adam Toledo. What does justice mean in each these cases, and will it be found amid all the heat and light? Violence is an ugly threat menacing police officers, protestors, bystanders, and passers-by alike. Even those simply minding their own business, serving their country in uniform, find themselves living in terror as they try to go about their daily lives.

These questions of justice, of right and wrong, and of a lack of peace aren't unique to certain cities, though, are they? They're not issues that are just "out there" and "somewhere else." Those issues, with some details adjusted, are writ large upon our globe, in every country and between countries. Those issues are at play in our own towns and communities. There is conflict, regret, shame, pain, and wrong in our own families and our own hearts. We have our own estranged relationships, tensions and histories where we are afraid our attempts to express what we truly feel for one another have been anemic, inadequate, misunderstood, and even hurtful. Spouses, children, and friends perceive a distance between us and aren't sure how to bridge the gap. Sometimes we hurt those we don't know by living in a dull complacency and complicity. Sometimes we have hurt those we love intentionally, striking out in our own pain. Sin seems to permeate our world.

To all of these issues, at all of these levels, we have a savior coming into our midst to offer words of comfort: "Peace be with you. Shalom aleichem. Shhh, it's OK."

## 4 Peace be with you

But make no mistake, Jesus isn't offering a pain-dulling opiate for the masses. Jesus isn't saying these things aren't wrong or that we shouldn't be concerned or upset. Jesus is not, *not*, *not* urging complacency. Jesus is not naive. Jesus knows what sin is. Just two days ago, Jesus had been murdered in the slowest, most painful, most deliberate way possible. And Jesus is all about action.

Jesus offers comfort and reassurance in order to prepare his disciples to *go out* and participate God's rigorous work of *changing the world entirely*. Jesus' resurrection from the dead was like a nuclear blast of change, and it was beginning to ripple out into the whole world, demolishing darkness wherever it went. The disciples have work to do, prophetic words to proclaim, deeds of power to perform. They have a new understanding of Scripture to absorb and repentance and forgiveness of sins to proclaim among all the nations.

This proclamation is what Peter was doing in our first reading as he spoke a hard word of conviction and offered forgiveness for those who were ready to acknowledge their mistakes and repent. Can you imagine the *chutzpah* of Peter, calling out the privilege and the injustice and the simple wrongness of his hearers, plainly implicating *them*, these "good" religious people, in the death of Jesus, and offering them the opportunity to acknowledge that guilt?

This is the message of our second reading, as St. John offers to his readers, and to us, the invitation to reject *our* sins, *our* mistakes, *our* acceptance of evil in the world around us, and to join in Jesus' work of change instead. St. John acknowledges that neither he nor his readers, nor we, have yet reached that point: "what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>1 John 3.2b NRSV

The disciples were living in shock and fear and terror. In many ways I have those same experiences today, as do many with whom I get to talk. That's what's in the air. But it was precisely into a time like this that the risen Christ spoke words of comfort and words of power. "Peace be with you. Shalom aleichem." What we see in the world around us, what we hear in the news, all this death and tragedy and wrongness: it isn't going to have the final word. We are a part of the Jesus movement, the Kingdom of God, a new order which promises to uphold the dignity of every human being and finally to fulfill that promise of God: "Peace be with you."