I’d like to tell you a story.

There once was a king who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried to rise to the challenge. The king looked at all the pictures. And, in the end, there were only two he really liked, and he had to choose between them.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror for peaceful towering mountains all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains, too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky, from which rain fell and in which lightning played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This did not look peaceful at all.

But when the king looked closely, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest - in perfect peace.

Which picture do you think won the prize? The king chose the second picture and he told the people his reason.

"Because," explained the king, "peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace."[[1]](#footnote-1)

When we enter John’s gospel this morning, the disciples are gathered in a locked room on Easter and nothing is as it should be. The disciples are sequestered there out of fear. They believe they will be sought out as followers of Jesus, criminals, associated with the leader of an insurgency.

Gathered there together in hiding, the friends are wary of every sound, every creak. Every knock on the door is met with suspicion

Jesus suddenly appears in the midst of them. And he greets them, “Peace be with you”. See that I am really here with you. See my hands and my side, and still I am with you. You are witnesses to God’s plan. See that I am whole and believe.

 “Peace be with you.”

The words are so familiar. The gospel writers record over and over Jesus speaking and acting in the name of God’s peace.

Peace – Comfort - “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you”

Peace – Protection - commanding, calming the waters.

Peace – Mission – Sent out the seventy-two to heal and teach, telling them, when you enter a house greet the inhabitants with “Peace to this house”.

Peace….it’s a familiar word, imbedded in our everyday lives and popular culture. Peace is something we long for. We look for ways to inner peace, peace of mind. Think about the last time you used the word Peace. Was it when you needed a little peace and quiet? Or perhaps it was as you prayed here in this place.

The apostle Paul used it in the salutation of nearly every letter he wrote. “Grace to you and Peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I often use Peace as a simple one word closing for an email. I like it because I can send along a prayer for the person I am writing to, whether they realize it or not.

Peace - In Hebrew it is Shalom, and in Arabic, Salaam. Did you know, the words Salaam and Islam are derived from the same root of language and meaning in Arabic? It was pointed out to me this morning that our “So long” likely came from a misunderstanding of English speaking soldiers of the salutation “Salaam”, given in the Mid-East.

In all three Abrahamic faiths “Peace” can be a simple greeting or an expression of deep care. In all three there is understanding of completeness, safety, prosperity and concern for the welfare of individuals and communities in the care and presence of the One God. Peace, Shalom and Salaam are strongly linked to justice, unification and the placement of everything in its proper order; the way God means for it to be. And for us, in a specifically Christian context, there is peace in the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ.

Peace is God drawing near to us, and God is ever longing for us to draw close………Close enough to see Jesus’ wounds, touch his flesh and bones, and to know the risen Christ. Theologian Stephen Cooper says this about the impact of the resurrection for believers. “Resurrection life brings peace; it calms, clarifies, unites and empowers us. Perhaps a sense of God’s peace is the way we can accept the radical message of the resurrection. To insist on the reality of the resurrection is to demand that we accept our present reality as the place where transformations of ultimate reality can take place.”

John gives us something that none of the other gospels do. Here in this room on the night of the resurrection, Jesus *breathes upon his disciples*. This is a vision of absolute Peace, a Peace that surpasses the guilt and shame of desertion, a Peace that heals the wounded soul. Just as God breathed life into a human being in the beginning, Jesus breathes God’s spirit into us.

This Peace Jesus gives to is more than wistful greeting card sentiment, easily expressed with a flowery message, and dismissed with an “Awww, isn’t that beautiful”. The reality we find in the resurrection means that all Jesus said in the scriptures is **true**.

Walter Brueggemann asserts that “God calls each of us to Shalom. Peace and all of its possibility is freely given and with it comes the responsibility to live into that gift. Just as with his disciples, the peace that Christ cultivates in us is a peace that arises out of, or sometimes in the absence of …… faith. Jesus’ Shalom is an announcement that God has a vision of how the world **shall be** and is not yet.”

It will be just a few short minutes and we will have the opportunity to greet each other in The Peace of the Lord. For me, this act of hospitality and caring is a small slice of God’s Kingdom that is being revealed to us. We’ll stand up, turn from side to side, extend a hand; we may even cross the aisle and hug each other. When you look your neighbor in the eye and bless them with this gift, what is it you are giving them? The words we use are the very same words that Jesus greeted the disciples after the resurrection, “Peace be with you”. This is a prayer, a priestly blessing we offer each other.

You know, what we do here is a pretty subversive act compared to the life that awaits us outside of our doors, an outside life that rewards us, most often not in Peace, but in competition with our neighbor. We are not simply a group of friends meeting to share a meal or catch up on each other’s news. We are gathered as Christ’s Body. Our peace is not rooted in the fact that we like the Red Sox, or that our kids and grandkids are on the same teams, or because we enjoy our friendships, all of which may be true. We are drawn here as brothers and sisters worshipping in the name of Jesus Christ. Christ’s Peace moves us beyond normal human relationships. We greet in Peace those we know and those we don’t, those we may or may not feel close to. We may even be called to greet in the peace of Christ, those we might hide behind closed doors in order to avoid. Through this greeting we are reconciled to each other.

People come to church with many different stories. We all have something to give, a care to lay at the feet of God, a thanksgiving to share. No matter our circumstances, when we enter into this beautiful, and sometimes uncomfortable, liturgical movement of “passing the peace”, we are assuring each other than no matter the circumstances, no matter our joy or the brokenness, no matter what you are going through, the Peace of Christ is with us in this place.

Today, in this place, may we know the peace of the resurrected Christ, may we be cradled in a safe nest and blessed with a calm heart in the midst of the noise, trouble and hard work. The Peace of the risen Lord be with you today and always. AMEN

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1. From the book: Stories for the Heart (p. 252, Catherine Marshall) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)