

Read John 20:24-29.

So what is peace to you? What came up in your conversations?

I thought of VACATION

or WHEN THE KIDS ARE AT CAMP and I have the whole house to myself.

Or the absence of stress

The absence of war

The absence of fear

QUIET. CALM. Nothing I HAVE to do.

In the passage we just read from John's gospel, the first words that came out of Jesus' mouth were, "PEACE be with you!" He said it twice. "Peace be with you!"

What comforting words to hear.

(I love the sound of it! PEACE...)

Ok, but what does it mean? What does peace look like?

My sister in law says she has found peace through doing hot yoga.

I have other friends who live crazy busy lives but plan vacations to "insert peace" into their schedules every so often.

Some of us go to certain places-- the lake or the mountains, to find peace.

But when peace is found in these activities or places, the question always remains... what happens when that hot yoga class is over or the vacation ends or you come back down from that mountain hike?

Jesus says the kind of peace he gives us is something altogether different than what we normally think of when we think of peace. Because earlier in John's gospel (before Jesus' death) he told his disciples, "Peace I leave with you, MY peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you."

The peace Christ gives is different because it's found in a person who has lived out the way of peace, and has paved the way for us to find peace in Him.

The word Jesus used for peace in our text is the Greek word, eirene, which stems from the Hebrew word, SHALOM.

To say shalom to someone is to pass on a blessing that says, "I wish you the well-being, wholeness, and satisfaction that comes from God alone."

In Jewish thought, to obtain the fullness of shalom is to receive salvation and redemption, reconciliation with God. That's what wholeness is, being found and held by God w/o any sin or darkness getting in the way. It's a sign that the Kingdom of God has come.

So you can see the significance of Jesus proclaiming SHALOM at that moment. They saw him die, they thought it was over, they were gripped with fear -- but Jesus moved right through those locked doors to say, once again, "It is finished! I've done what I was sent to do-- Shalom has been fulfilled, through me!"

We see that reality of shalom played out in our text, and I want to share some thoughts about how I see God's peace revealed.

First, Jesus' peace didn't involve the absence of fearful circumstances. The fact that Jesus said, "Peace be with you!" didn't mean all the dangers suddenly disappeared. I'm sure the Roman soldiers were on a manhunt for Jesus who disappeared from the tomb and they were probably on the search for the disciples as well. So all that didn't change. The disciples truly had reason to fear, if you just look at the reality of the situation.

BUT The difference is, Jesus showed up! Jesus' presence in the midst of our fears makes all the difference.

We are so blessed to have Jim here. Oh my goodness, I am praying for you to have peace in the midst of all that's going on with your folks!

But the reason Jim is here is because MaryAnne had cataract surgery last week. I've had that surgery-- IT'S WEIRD. And if you think about it too much, it's REALLY WEIRD and anxiety producing because a needle (or laser) goes right through your eye...

I told her, don't worry- whatever they give you makes you not really realize what's going on...

She said, right when he was going to do the surgery "I don't know if it was the medication or what, but I just felt so peaceful! I felt all like I had all these prayers covering me..."

Did the reality of her situation change? No, a Dr. was inserting a needle into her eyeball. (Or a lazer) But Jesus showed up!!!

2nd thing I see:

I see the shalom of God when Jesus didn't give his disciples the scolding they deserved. Instead, he blessed them with peace.

Jesus had all the right and reason in the world to show up and say, "Have I got some words for you!" After all, Jesus hadn't spoken to them since he was in the garden of Gethsemane right before his arrest...

Jesus had all the right to call them on their flakiness saying, "Where were you, guys?"

I thought you were my friends, my followers.

Why did you desert me? Why did you run away?

Why did you sleep when I needed you?

Peter, why did you say you didn't know me? You're the one who said you would die for me!" (Oh my goodness, could you imagine that kind of come back???)

But there was no condemnation, just BLESSING. PEACE.
ALL IS WELL.

Have you ever experienced that? You did something wrong or said something hurtful. And you deserved something awful. But you got an embrace and an "I love you" instead of harsh words.

Forgiveness is a wonderful thing.

IT'S DEFINITELY A BIG ASPECT OF GOD'S PEACE THAT IS NOT AS THE WORLD GIVES.

God is VERY PATIENT with us.

And don't get me wrong, God also judges and convicts and sets us right- oh, how we need that! But we never really get what we deserve, do we. The peace of Christ is demonstrated in God's extreme patience with all of us.

A third thing I'll mention about how shalom is revealed in our text is in the way God gives direction amidst a lack of peace. Let's face it. We have a lot of things we could worry about I found this list from a sermon by Katie Huey: "Two wars that drag on past six years, with 4200+ American soldiers and countless Iraqis killed, an economic crisis threatening thousands with foreclosure and bankruptcy, high unemployment, high gasoline prices, high health care costs. And there are our own private griefs and burdens: health problems, kid problems, too much work, too much worry, too much coming at us, so much to run away from, so much to fear..." Can't you just feel your blood pressure rise listening to that?

Sometimes it seems like the best solution is to lock ourselves up – in our houses, or in the walls of the church. It's easy to think, "It's not safe out there, so I've got to barricade myself in here where it's safe."

And yet when the disciples did that they felt nothing but FEAR. There was no peace in that, no solution to their fear.

Instead, Jesus required the unthinkable! He propelled them out into the world they feared. But the difference is, he gave them his Holy Spirit. Jesus was never far away. He was right there with them, leading and guiding them every step of the way.

His words were, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you. And what did the Father send Jesus to do? To DIE.

IT DOESN'T SOUND VERY PEACEFUL! And the disciples lives, by all appearances, were definitely NOT what we'd consider peaceful from here on out. (constantly being flogged and put in jail, on a run for their lives at times!)

"SO SEND I YOU, he said

Last Tuesday night at our Session meeting I read Matthew 6 when Jesus said, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat and what you will drink...” And I asked everyone to share a current worry so we could pray for those. Our personal worries as well as the concerns of the church...

After the meeting I realized, yes we're called to pray for the things we're worried about but that passage includes something proactive we're supposed to do.

It includes Matthew 6:33 that says, In the midst of your worries “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things (all the provisions God gives) will be added unto you.

So maybe when Jesus says “so send I you” it means seeking God's reign (kingdom) in the midst of our worries...

It means leaving our own lives behind and taking on Jesus' way of peace. It involves loving as Jesus loved which means WITH LOTS OF GRACE, and LOTS OF FORGIVENESS. Isn't that the heart of what Jesus' shalom is all about?

The last thing I'll mention about God's shalom working its way through our passage involves Thomas. And it involves you and me. That is, shalom is experienced in community.

Usually when we read this passage our focus is on Thomas, the doubter, but what about Thomas the independent one? Or Thomas the loner? Or Thomas the “I've got better things to do”? I'm not sure what to make of it, but Thomas wasn't with the others, so he couldn't share in their initial joy of seeing Jesus. NOT ONLY THAT BUT IT KEPT HIM FROM BELIEVING THE TRUTH.

What was he doing? I guess one could say, since he wasn't locked up with the others, maybe he wasn't afraid like they were. He was out and about running errands or something.

But on the other hand you could suppose that he was SO AFRAID that he ran even further away- not just away from the Jews, but away from those who could really give him comfort and hope.

Whatever you want to say about it, Thomas missed out. He wasn't there with the others.

The wonderful thing is, Jesus came back for him anyway!!! Another sign of God showering us with blessing when we don't deserve it.

And the lesson for us is, stay connected to your church family. We're not meant to be loners in the faith.

We need each other.

I learn from you, you learn from me.

Wherever you're at in your faith today, WE NEED YOU HERE. We grow TOGETHER.

And the fact is, when we stop worshiping together, we begin to lose sight of who we are and what we are called to as followers of Jesus. We miss out on the SHALOM God wants to speak to us.

I want to read that last verse again. (29) BLESSED = Happy.
Happy are those who believe in Jesus. Who trust in him, who walk with him, whose peace is found in him.

“Recognized or unrecognized, Jesus sleeps in the deepest cells of us all, and whatever we do or wherever we go, in whatever way we can, may we call on Him to come awake within us, to give us courage, to give us hope, to show us, each one, our way; especially when the winds go mad, and the waves run wild, as they will for us all before we’re done, so that even in their midst, we may find peace, find HIM.”

~Frederick Buechner