

Sunday Morning Meditation

April 19, 2020 – Second Sunday of Easter

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Peace Through Love

Scripture Passage – [John 20:19-31](#)

I have always loved this story, there are so many layers resulting in so many angles a person could approach this story from. One could focus on “Doubting Thomas”. An empiricist is someone who demands that there be physical evidence that can be processed through the five senses, before they will believe anything is true. Thomas wants this kind of proof; he wants to see and touch the holes in Jesus’ hands and he wants to see and put his hand in Jesus’ side. Thomas wants empirical evidence, evidence that can be touched with his hands and seen with his eyes, before he will believe that Jesus has risen from the dead. Clearly, the testimony of the other disciples, his brothers, will not suffice.

John appears to tell Thomas’ story for our benefit. Because at the climax of the story, John praises us and all believers who throughout history have chosen to believe in Jesus, even though we could not touch the holes in his hands or put our hand into his side. We believe without seeing, or perhaps a better way of saying it is this: Believing is seeing. Because we believe in Jesus’ death and resurrection, we see the world in an entirely novel way.

One of the novel ways that we see the world is through the lens of peace. In the John 20 passage that was read for us this morning, John intentionally records the traditional Jewish greeting of “Peace be with you” being offered by Jesus to his disciples three times. In one sense, this traditional greeting is nothing more than a social custom, repeated over and over again throughout the day by good Jewish people. “Peace be with you” in their context would be akin to us saying “Have a good day!”. “Peace be with you” did not necessarily reflect any deep theological meaning; it was simply a greeting.

But in this context, it is clear that John wants us to understand that Jesus had a much deeper meaning in mind. Why do I say such? Well after the first and third time Jesus said to his disciples, "Peace be with you!", Jesus himself directly referenced the holes in his hands and the hole in his side. Listen to John 20:19-20. ***"Jesus said, 'Peace be with you!'"*** ²⁰ ***After he said this, he showed them his hands and side."*** Then later, directly to Thomas, Jesus said, ***"Peace be with you!"*** ²⁷ ***Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side."***

Now the connection that Jesus is attempting to make eminently clear to his disciples and to us is multifaceted. We could talk about how the peace that Jesus offers is directly related to the holes in his hands and the hole in his side. In other words, the peace that Jesus offers is the direct result of Jesus' death and resurrection. In and through Jesus' death and resurrection, the wages of sin, which is death, and Satan's power over humanity, which is death, were broken. Jesus has established a new pattern, a new way, the way of death and resurrection. For those who believe in him, who die with him and rise with him, they can embrace this new pattern for their lives, and experience a profound sense of peace.

Or perhaps we could explore the nature of this peace that Jesus is bestowing on his disciples through his death and resurrection. Perhaps Paul grasps this most acutely in Ephesians 2, when Paul emphasized that through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the barrier of alienation (death) between humankind and God has been eliminated, and we can be at peace with God. We can draw near to God, experience fellowship with God, because sin has been forgiven and death has been conquered. Paul, in this context, also emphasized what we spoke of last week. To be at peace with God and not at peace with our fellow human beings, is not true peace. So, Paul emphasized that through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the barriers of race, gender, nationality, class and so on that separate people have been eliminated, and we can be at peace with one another.

But as interesting as it would be to explore these more deeply, I personally believe that the central point that Jesus is trying to make has more to do with how "peace" has been won. Jesus twice said, "Peace be with you" and then referenced the holes in his hands and the hole in his side,

because the means of how peace came into being was through Jesus' suffering death. The peace Jesus offers is not a peace that was earned through force or violence, it is a peace that was earned through self-giving, non-violent love. It was Jesus' love, his suffering love on the cross, that makes peace possible.

In our world today, people often speak of "peace through strength." This was a popular mantra of the Reagan Administration... and the Roosevelt Administration. FDR in some of his "fireside chats" argued in favor of peace through strength. Both parties have lived by the mantra that peace comes through strength. Normally this means a robust commitment to defense spending and a willingness to use such means when necessary. While setting aside the issue of the State and what Paul meant by the State's mandate to "bear the sword", one cannot help but see a striking contrast between humankind's "peace through strength" and Jesus' peace through love.

Jesus has brought a deep and lasting peace to our lives. And it is critical that we understand how Jesus made this peace a reality. Jesus' way was through love. Through self-giving, self-sacrificing, non-violent love. Through nails in his hands and feet and a spear in his side... kind of love. Love in love's most pure form.

In this passage, John utilizes a form of the ancient literary technique called *chiasmus*. But that sounds really foreign and complex, so let me use my mentor Dr. Craig Blomberg's term. Blomberg called John's use of the three "Peace be with you" blessings in this context, the "Oreo Effect." We all know and love Oreos! Two chocolate cookies with a cream filling. Blomberg suggests that the two chocolate cookies are the first and last time Jesus said "Peace be with you" because in each of those times Jesus referenced his hands and his side. But the second time, the middle time, the cream filling, was when Jesus said "Peace be with you" and then breathed the Holy Spirit on the disciples and told them he was sending them out into the world just as the Father had sent him. Did you hear that? In my estimation, much of the church has missed the cream filling of this Oreo cookie! As the Father sent Jesus, Jesus is sending us. The Father sent Jesus to make peace through self-giving, non-violent love. This is the clear intention of the text. And so, Jesus is sending us into the world to

make peace through love! Thankfully, Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on us to empower us for our peacemaking work!

So does this mean that we are not sent into the world to preach the good news of the kingdom, or witness to the lost, or feed the hungry? Of course not. We are sent into the world to do the many things that Jesus did – preaching the good news of the kingdom, witnessing to the lost, feeding the hungry, building shelter for the homeless and so on. But the key of this passage, is that we do all these kingdom activities in and through love. The end and the means are one, and they are defined by love.