

“Peace Be With You”

It has been a while since I have done so, but I love to talk with a group of small children. Because I am not their parent or grandparent, I tend to be amused and laugh right out loud at them or with them. They are fun, willing to learn, and they want to believe. Harken back to last week. How many of your children or grandchildren were waiting to see what the Easter Bunny had brought? As I said, kids want to believe. Until they have been taught differently, they usually see the good and hope for the best. How many of us remember being like this when we were kids?

And then we grew older. We faced disappointments. For some of us, the disappointments were relatively minor and trivial, while other kids faced huge disappointments when promises were broken, or things didn't come out in a storybook or fairy tale ending. As we grew older, we may have been much more guarded because of these things, even when life was going well. We always had to keep up a front in case we were once again disappointed. But, I don't know if we ever truly give up the notion that we want to believe, even when we are afraid to do so.

Jesus' followers wanted to believe. We know from numerous sources, both religious and secular, that they believed that Jesus was the Promised Messiah, especially if you read Matthew's gospel. They weren't exactly sure what kind of messiah Jesus of Nazareth would be. Throughout his ministry, they would be stumped by some of his sayings that seemed so easy. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, come follow me, my kingdom is not of this world; these are all things that Jesus had said to them. Love one another as I have loved you. I am the Good Shepherd. And then, in twelve to twenty-four hours, they watched the whole thing seemingly disappear.

Those men hid because they thought they were next. If the Jewish leaders could talk Pontius Pilate into executing (yes, crucifixion was execution) Jesus in a relatively short amount of time, then imagine what those leaders could have the Romans do to them? The beatings alone would have killed most people, let alone the gruesomeness of crucifixion. Ah, but what about that morning? (Scripture Scholars differ on whether this took place that night or the following Sunday.)

According to Luke, the women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the

mother of James, and “other women” who came and told them that the body was missing. The words of the two dazzling men in white rang in their heads: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” What had happened to the body of Jesus?

This is why that door had been secured. The appearance of the Risen Christ must have scared them half to death. Jesus figured that out as his first words were, “Peace be with you.” This was Christ’s way of telling the Apostles and those gathered with them that all was going to be ok. I wonder, though, how many of them were still skeptical?

For Christians in 2025, recent events have caused us all to be a little skeptical, regardless of what side of the aisle you sit. We all need to experience some peace today. That being said, I hope you are able to take the words of Jesus to heart. “Peace be with you.” Some of us are even “hiding,” as I hear people say, “I can’t watch or even listen to the news these days.” I get, everyone is tired of bickering, defending, or listening to the arguing. Peace sounds like a good thing.

However, we cannot just say “Peace be with you” without doing something about it. We are also called to be agents of peace. While

Jesus didn't officially knock on this door, I was drawn to a story about Pope Francis, while he was still Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio. When they were in the conclave that was to elect him as Pope, Cardinal Bergoglio offered a reflection upon the familiar image of Jesus standing and knocking at the door. The traditional and pious reading, he noted, is that Jesus is knocking to be admitted, to come into our hearts, to enter our lives. But what, he said, if Jesus is knocking for us to come out instead, to join him in the world outside? Sometimes that can be very scary. We want to hide, but what if Jesus is calling us to come outside to help?

Eventually, those who were in the room outside cast aside their doubts and took Jesus' invitation to heart. As we continue our readings from the Acts of the Apostles as well as other Scripture, we will see how they lived this out two thousand years ago. They had to take themselves out of hiding and go out into public places. You may be surprised to learn this, but we do this often in our churches, in our thrift shops, food pantries, and soup kitchens/community tables. We do it in school, at work, at the gym, on the pickleball courts, senior centers—everywhere we go. Now, before you get too nervous, we can spread this peace of Christ

by action and not by walking into a room and proclaiming, “Peace be with you!”

As our churches continue to grow, we have to encourage others to join us in our worship as well as our work. In the words of Pope Francis, “We must restore hope to young people, help the old, be open to the future, and spread love. Be poor among the poor. We need to include the excluded and preach peace.” Let everyone know by our actions and words, “Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen, indeed!”