
Shalom, Salam, Peace Be with You

An Evensong meditation by the Rev. Salmoon Bashir
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Shalom, Salam, Peace! In many cultures, countries, and languages, greeting someone wishing or bringing peace to them. I grew up saying Salam as a greeting, which means Peace. In the other Georgia, my wife's home country, people greet one another similarly at any time of day – "I wish you a morning of peace. I wish you an afternoon of peace, a night of peace." It means bringing peace to the person you are greeting, bringing peace to their families and all of their belongings. You could say that peace is one of the most important things for people in this world.

Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Today's reading is one of four post-resurrection stories in the Gospel of John. The disciples are gathered at a house in or near Jerusalem. The reason for the disciples to meet behind locked doors is fear. The consuming fear of being caught and persecuted. Maybe the disciples were disappointed and sad by Jesus' death but at the same time somewhat relieved that they didn't have to go through the events of the passion week again. But when women, the first evangelists told them the good news of Jesus' resurrection, the fear, the anxiety hit them back. And they hid themselves behind closed doors. The fear of persecution led them behind closed doors.

The disciples are fearful. Good news does not erase fear. Good news, incredible news, can kindle hope, but even hope does not eliminate genuine fear.

So, there they are in a familiar place desperate with unfamiliar fear. An empty tomb isn't enough to confirm all that Jesus promised is true. John says in today's gospel that they had locked the door "for fear of the Judeans" - but that isn't a very sound explanation. Because when Mary said that the tomb was empty, Peter and John rushed straight there. Now, if they were really afraid of the Judeans— or the Romans for that matter – they wouldn't have gone back to the tomb because that is the one place where the authorities would have been hoping to capture them.

This means the fear of the Judeans couldn't have been the sole reason... So, what was **really** making them afraid? What were they really running from? **Who** were they **really** hiding from? Maybe they were actually afraid of running into Jesus!

What if Mary was right? What if Jesus had been raised from the dead? What would he say if they saw him? They had every reason to be afraid, to be ashamed.

Sometimes we want to live in the same illusion where we don't have to face the reality and instead, we try to hide ourselves from God and from one another. Instead of being a true friend, a true disciple we prefer to hide behind closed doors.

Sometimes, we are not even honest with ourselves about why we are hiding or what we are hiding from. Maybe the disciples weren't keeping the Judeans out. They were keeping themselves in.

When I think of disciples, I am reminded of some of the events when due to fear I hid my faith. And I think of the disciples as humans. I think of them like me and you!

But, Jesus knew that they were scared – only a few days ago, they had rejected him and said that they didn't even know him because they were afraid. Jesus knew this and he came and greeted them, shalom aleichem "peace be upon you, Peace be with you."

What does Jesus do? Jesus did what he always does when we try to hide from him: "Jesus came and stood among them..."

He enters the room – and breaks into their shame and fear and offers them peace which surpasses all understanding. Peace be with you! These were Jesus' words to them.

How many times has it happened to us? When Jesus wants to meet us in the open, we hide ourselves behind closed doors?

But still Jesus comes in and says shalom aleichem "Peace be upon you, Peace be with you". When our own guilt and condemnation gets in our way, and we become scared and hide ourselves, remember, my dear brothers and sisters, Jesus breaks into our shame and fear and invites us to enter in peace with him, the peace which surpasses all understanding. Shalom, Salam, or Peace, means wholeness, or well-being, a state of offering where one person can offer well-being, best wishes to the other.

With all that had happened with Jesus over the passion weekend, Jesus still offered peace to his beloved friends. Peace, I give you, my friend! Peace over fear! Peace over uncertainty! Shalom, Salam, Peace, I give you! This is not the end of the story! You know what happened next!

The disciples who were afraid of the authorities, these same disciples when they received the peace from Jesus and received the Holy spirit, through all the dangers and persecution, they were bold enough to spread the good news, to spread the same peace which surpasses all understanding.

I believe our stories are not so different from the disciples'. The invitation of peace is not only for those who are qualified. Jesus invited everyone, those who deny him, those who are scared and who doubt Him. Because only Jesus can turn our doubts and fears into His peace.

Friends, Easter tidings is spreading that Peace to all, to all who come to this Holy place and all that we come in contact within our lives. May we accept Jesus' peace and bring the good news of Shalom to the world which is desperate for it especially at this moment. Jesus said, Salam, Shalom, Peace, I give you, Peace I leave with you! Amen!