

**Rev. Dr. David Holyan**  
**“The Gift of Peace Be With You”**  
**First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood**  
**Sunday, April 28, 2019**

**Acts 5:27-32**

*When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, saying, ‘We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man’s blood on us.’ But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, so that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.’*

**John 20:19-31**

*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’*

*But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.’*

*A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’*

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

Let us pray. Gracious God, let us embrace this gift of peace. Nurture its growth through our worship, through our songs, our prayers, through the words that we've heard from scripture and the words of what you would like me to share this morning. May it be a word of peace. And may we as your people surrounded by the promise of grace and mercy embody peace in this world. May we become the word of peace enfolded. And may we go forth from this time of worship speaking your peace, acting in ways that bring about peace, resting in the peace that only you can promise us. A peace that surpasses the understanding of the world in which we live. Let your spirit do its work now and forever. In Christ name, we pray. Amen.

On this Sunday after Easter, the second Sunday where we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the story that is shared is the continuation of that Easter morning. It's now late in the evening. The disciples, even though Mary has come and shared with them what she has seen and heard, they're not quite sure what's happening. They're afraid that the authorities that took Jesus away are going to now come and get them. And so they're locked in a room probably praying, hoping for protection trying to figure out what's going on. And in the midst of that fear and unknown, Jesus shows up among them and says, "Peace be with you. Shalom aleichem." He shows them his hands, his side. The disciples rejoice that it's really him. And he says to them again, "Peace be with you." I find it intriguing that when Jesus first shows up among the disciples he doesn't shout, "Look. It's me. I'm alive." Just as he doesn't do that at the tomb when Mary is

standing there wondering what they have done with her beloved Lord. She's talking to a gardener, the gardener's talking to her, the gardener's Jesus. And Jesus doesn't say, "Hey Mary. Look, it's me. I made it." So now with the disciples, he does the same thing. He shows up and he offers them peace. Now we can take this offering of Jesus and make it something incredibly special. But in the language of the day, what Jesus is saying to them is simply, "Good evening." Or as we say here at church regardless of time, "Good morning." It's a common welcome that people offer to each other in passing. Shalom aleichem, shalom--on and on and on they go. But I hope that on this evening of Easter Jesus is not simply standing there saying, "Good evening. Look at my hands. Look at my side. Good evening." but instead is offering them a true gift. And in this passage, we also need to see the progression in what Jesus says and does in these very few verses. The first thing is he says, "Peace be with you." twice. And then he breathes on them and says, "Receive the holy spirit I'm sending you just as I was sent." And then, finally, he says, "You now can forgive sins or you can retain them." So from peace to spirit to the power to forgive, Jesus is sharing with his disciples and really equipping them to begin their work of carrying on his ministry.

Would you offer peace to your friends if you showed up unexpected when they thought something horrible had happened? When all over Facebook there's a, "Hey. Have you seen Terri? I haven't seen her in a few days. What's going on? I thought she was coming to the dinner party. She's not here. I thought she was picking up the kids. She hasn't. Oh my Gosh. Have we reached out to her family? No. And no one's heard anything." And the worry just begins to build and build and build. And Terri finds out about it and she shows up at the rally that they're having to distribute all the posters on all of the telephone poles, "If you've seen Terri call da-da-da." She walks into the room and says, "Hey. It's me. I'm here." And they all have the same reaction that the disciples-- they come up, they hug-- "Oh. You're alive. Thank goodness." Except in this passage like every other passage that Jesus appears in, he's turning our expectations, the world's expectations upside down. Part of me was trying to imagine Jesus showing up with an iPhone. The disciples are huddled in the corner afraid. They're like, "What's going on?" Jesus shows up turns around with his phone trying to take a selfie to get himself and all of his buddies in the picture. Takes it and then posts it social media with the hashtag, "I'm alive." No. That's not what Jesus does. Jesus sends a message to his friends, "Peace be with you." And it's not just peace. Shalom is a word that most often is translated as peace but in the Hebrew, it has such a rich and beautiful-- a fullness of definitions if you will. It means peace, harmony, tranquility safety, welfare, well-being, health, wholeness. In a sense, Jesus is saying, everything is okay, you, us, it. It's all fine because we're being embraced by the promises of God. And the challenge for the disciples is the same challenge each of us face, will we embrace the gift we are given? Will we allow peace to vibrate in our souls, to change our behavior, to change the way we talk to others? Will we allow peace to redirect our energy so that we're not trying to aggrandize ourselves, but maybe we're trying to help someone else.

So as I was thinking about Jesus trying to take a selfie and post it on Twitter. I was curious who has the most Twitter followers. I thought for sure it would be Kim Kardashian, and I was wrong. The person with the most Twitter followers is Katy Perry. 107 million followers. I learned earlier at the Arise service, according to Mark Robinson, that the reason she's gotten higher followers than the second person is because she just recently got a cat. The person with the second most followers has 105 million. His name is Barack Obama. Kim Kardashian, if I remember correctly, was number eight, but she's on the list. And then I thought if Jesus were on Twitter today, how many followers would he have? How many people would be paying attention to the things that he would post? And I found out that in the world today there are roughly 2.2 billion Christians,--2.2 billion! And then I imagined all of them getting something on their Twitter feed that said, simply share the peace with everyone. And I imagined what kind of world we might live in if that were the case, where everyone saw themselves as the embodied presence of peace in this world. I wonder about the gun violence that we are so often shocked with on the news headlines, another school shooting or church shooting or recently, the headlines are about a synagogue near San Diego. I wonder if all of us lived out peace be with you if maybe that violence might drop. I think about all the natural disasters that we are mindful of, especially through Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

I think about the 16 people that went from this congregation to Hattiesburg to help out others. Imagine if 46 people went or 106 or 206. The amount of good that can happen can multiply by every person because that one person can affect others and it just keeps growing out. Peace be with you. I'm mindful today that the flowers in front of the lectern were from Tom Robert's memorial service yesterday. And I was thinking about the power of the gift that we would give to someone if we gave them maybe one of the red flowers out of that bouquet when they were hurting. We offer them a simple single flower and say, "Peace be with you." It would have significance and impact, but when we're able to offer a bouquet that has yellows and reds and greens and fuchsia colors and orange, there's just a richness that comes with that. The richness of a word like Shalom, peace, harmony, tranquility, safety, welfare, well-being, health, wholeness, all of those things we offer.

And lastly, I'm mindful on this Sunday where we celebrate the gifts of music and appreciate the impact that music and the music programs of this congregation have on each of our lives is how important it is to have that bouquet of gifts in the different sections of the choir, and in the different ages of the children, in the different octaves of the bells. Beauty and music comes from multiple sounds, multiple voices, coming together in harmony to create peace and tranquility and a sense of well being and wholeness in a way that words can never do it. In a world that constantly is out there teaching all of us and especially our young ones to advocate for themselves, be grand, be bold, be yourself. Christ's word here says, "Wait a minute. Be at peace. Love your neighbor. Forgive what they do." My hope is that that beauty shines more in the days ahead. Amen.