

April 18, 2021
3rd Sunday of Easter
Acts 3:13-15, 17-19
1John 2:1-5a
Luke 24:35-48

There are so many rich themes and messages coursing through these readings for this 3rd Sunday of Easter.

Today let's talk about:

- Peace
- Mercy
- Life, and
- Witness

Jesus' first words to His disciples are: "Peace be with you". This may be the most beautiful phrase ever uttered. In Aramaic, the language Jesus and his disciples mostly spoke with one another, Jesus would have said: "Salam alaikum". If on these occasions Jesus had chosen to use the traditional form of Jewish greeting, He would have said: "Shalom Aleichem".

No matter the words used, I've often wondered what Jesus really means when He extends His peace; His shalom. Of course in God's timeless eternal existence we cannot even begin to imagine what peace He has in store for us.

But what about in this world, when like the disciples, we often find ourselves startled and terrified when events in our own lives and around the world seem to rage out of control? What is Jesus' peace really like in the reality of our earthly existence?

I believe Jesus' peace is twofold:

- 1.) Feeling completely comfortable with who you are, with where you are, and with what you are doing; and
- 2.) Being and remaining faithful to yourself in the secure knowledge that you are a unique creation of our loving God.

Attaining this level of peace in this world is no easy task. We cannot get there without God's help; without the gift of His grace. It's a gift well worth praying for. I pray that your faith journey will bring each of you closer to such peace.

In the gospel today, as Jesus extends His peace to His disciples, He also reveals to them the scars left on His body from His passion and crucifixion. In bringing His peace to this world, the world exacted a terrible price from Jesus.

I'm afraid the same can be true for us. When you get to the place where you are completely comfortable with yourself, with what you are doing, and with your faithfulness to yourself and to God and His community, you may find that the world is not so comfortable with you. You may find that the world will exact from you a price for your faithfulness, leaving you scarred like Jesus. The world does not always treat kindly those who insist on doing the right thing. Just recall the events of 53 years ago when the voices for change of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were suddenly silenced.

Faithful people will get scarred. You may feel you are being scarred in this life, and so you may be. Jesus' challenge to us when He extends to

us His peace is to joyfully live in His peace no matter the personal challenge. If we accept Jesus' peace, if we are faithful to Him and to ourselves, and if we are comfortable in our own skin, the world cannot disturb either our relationship with Jesus or our own inner peace that is His gift to us, no matter what misguided truths the world may seek to inflict upon us.

"The quality of mercy is not strained;/
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath./ It is twice blest;/
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:/
'T is mightiest in the mightiest;/ it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown:/
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;/
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;/
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings,/
It is an attribute to God himself;/
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice."/

I'm sure most of you recognize this lovely poetic description of mercy from William Shakespeare's play "The Merchant of Venice". As some of you know, I spent a few years living and working in Denmark back in the 80's. Though known as a stoic people, once in a while the small Danish film industry produces a masterpiece. Such is the case of a 1980's film entitled *Babette's Gaestebud*, *Babette's Feast*. The movie can be boiled down to 1 classic line: "Mercy imposes no conditions". (REPEAT)

Our gospel today is yet another example of God's infinite mercy. Jesus lovingly appears to His disciples, all but one of whom deserted Him in His hour of greatest need. All is forgiven and forgotten. Jesus knows

that the extension of mercy always pays dividends, something we should keep in mind in our own dealings with the world.

Luke wrote his Gospel in Greek. The Greek word for mercy is "eleos", but it is also often translated as "justice". Sometime when you're reading the Bible, substitute the word "mercy" whenever the word "justice" appears. I promise you it will be a powerful and uplifting experience.

I once read a heartwarming description of God's mercy. The mother of one of the Sandy Hook children murdered in that school shooting wrote a book about her family's ordeal. The child who died was named Emily. There is a scene in the book where the dad is putting Emily's little sister to bed after the tragedy. After saying her prayers, the little girl asks her dad if Emily is in heaven, and the dad answers that he is sure she is. The little girl then asks her dad how he thinks God feels about the boy who shot Emily. Taken aback, the dad asks the little girl

what she thinks. The girl responded: "I think God still loves him; I just think that God may be disappointed with the choice he made". Out of the mouths of babes....

All three of the readings today talk about resurrected life.

Through our belief in Him and His Resurrection, Jesus promises us life eternal, His gift freely given to us as we profess our belief to the world that Jesus is the Son of God. Always choose life, and always choose to be life-giving to others.

The gospel today closes with Jesus saying: "You are witnesses of these things". Typically we think of a witness as someone who tells what he or she has seen. We think of a witness as a passive observer of an event, not as a participant in the event.

But when Jesus calls us to witness, He is calling us to action.

He is calling us to live in His peace no matter the worldly influences that surround us.

He is calling us to always temper justice with mercy.

In His invitation to join Him in His resurrected life, Jesus is calling us to not only choose life, but to celebrate life:

- Birth over abortion
- Peace over war
- Mercy over execution
- Suicide prevention over suicide
- Loving palliative and pastoral care over suicide and murder.
- People over profits

As we continue our celebration, let us pray for the grace to be the witnesses that Jesus calls us to be, a people who walk the walk of Jesus.

And may our loving God bring us all to everlasting life, just as He brought Jesus to resurrected life.