

Having Peace, Becoming Peace
Luke 24: 13-24 John 20:19-21
Easter 2026

Our next reading from John's gospel is what takes place on Easter *evening*. That *morning*, as John tells us, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb with spices to anoint Jesus' body, but didn't find him there. She stayed there, weeping, and in a tender moment Jesus appears to her, though she doesn't recognize him—like the two disciples we heard about from Luke's *mid-afternoon* account that Annie read for us. They didn't recognize him either. Mary Magdalene thinks he's the gardener. Jesus then says one word to her: "Mary." He says her name, and then he sends her on a mission to go tell the others that he is alive.

This is the very next passage, in John's gospel.

John 20:19-21

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 religious leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side (i.o.w., his wounds; he shows them his wounds). 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."

This is the word of the Lord.

I'd like to reflect on a couple gems that we discover from this passage, and from the other Easter accounts like it. Or, perhaps these are a couple or three sides of one gem. Either way, I found this passage, and the other resurrection day accounts, encouraging, and rich with meaning for us in this particular Easter season.

First, we learn, not just from this one but from *all* of the Easter accounts, that after the resurrection the only people Jesus appeared to were *individuals, or small groups of people*, all of whom were either afraid, disappointed, or discouraged. He appeared to people who were hoping for something more.

It's important to note that he didn't appear to his enemies, and say "Haha! I won. Neener, neener..." He didn't appear to Pontius Pilate, who sentenced him to death. He didn't appear to the uptight rule-obsessed religious ones, the Pharisees, who made his life miserable for 3 years. He didn't appear to the Roman soldiers who mocked him and tortured him. He didn't appear to Herod, the government appointed "King of the Jews" as he was called, the treacherous and somewhat psychopathic leader who was responsible for the murder or massacre of hundreds of people he felt threatened by. Herod tried to murder Jesus when he was a child, because he felt threatened by what was being said about him.

Jesus appeared to none of these people. He appeared only:

-to those who at some point trusted in him yet had given up or were disappointed;

-to those who were afraid, or just plain sad and grieving;

-or to those who failed in some way, like Peter, who was in despair—not because of disappointment but because of personal failure. And there is a beautiful account in John’s gospel of the risen Jesus appearing to Peter and graciously refreshing his life, and then giving Peter significant work to do.

What all of this tells us is that the most important thing Jesus wants to do is come alongside people who are hurting, afraid, or disappointed. He doesn’t want to go to the halls of power and manage the world from there. To show people who is boss. After all, following the resurrection, Rome was still Rome. Pontius Pilate remained governor. Herod remained “King of the Jews,” the Roman emperor ruled several more years. And the Pharisees and other uptight religious folks, some of whom were in cahoots with Roman power, continued their crusades against people they deemed as unworthy of God’s good graces.

It's pretty clear from his life, death, and now his resurrection appearances that Jesus wasn’t interested in being a tool of the state, or in charge of it. And that may be a disappointment to many people today.

This is what the two disciples on the road to Emmaus were experiencing, as we heard in the first reading from Luke. They were disappointed. And they were disappointed, largely because they had misguided expectations of who Jesus was and what he had come to do. They expected Jesus to take charge. As you heard, they say: "*But we had hoped* he would be the one to redeem Israel." That's a way of saying, they hoped he would re-consolidate Israel as a national regional power, and free them from their enemies. They expected Jesus to be their earthly king and commander in chief and restore Israel to some imagined glory days. But he had no interest in that. And now he's dead, so they lost hope. And great is their disappointment.

And by the way, the first four words they speak stand out to me, because it's a four-word statement that we all have made, and sometimes still make, in our lives: "*But we had hoped...*" But we had hoped...

In all of the gains and the losses of life, we come to know these words: "*But we had hoped...* to raise a family, have a happy life, and then the doctor gave us the diagnosis..."

"*But we had hoped...* had this great dream, going to do wonderful things, and then I lost my job. And I felt like such a failure."

"But we had hoped... to retire together and enjoy travelling and visiting kids and grandkids. Then the sudden death, and now I'm alone."

"But we had hoped... that we were making progress in securing peace and equality in our world and our society. And then a dictator invades Ukraine, and then unelected persons fire people from their jobs and slash needed resources for our common health and wellbeing, without reason. And then our administration starts a widespread war in the middle east." *But we had hoped...* we were doing better than that.

And the temptation, then, is to give up hope. And that's the state of mind and heart of pretty much everyone in the gospel accounts after Jesus' death. They're disappointed.

But then... they encounter the risen Christ. He appears to them, individually or in small groups, and reminds them of why he came: not to take charge, but to heal human hearts; to meet people in the midst of their pain and their struggles; to give people's lives meaning and purpose; and mostly, to remind people... that *God... is... love*. Jesus, the human Jesus, was the face of God to the world, and what that face—that person—revealed and told, and still tells the world now, is that God knows us by name, and that God cares about every

person, no matter who they are, where they're from, where they've been; and that God cares about what's going on in their life.

Easter is not God fixing the news cycle. Easter is God breaking the power of despair by showing up in personal ways to the people who need it most.

This is why he shows them his wounds. He did the same thing to doubting Thomas. When Jesus appears to Thomas (doubting Thomas), he showed him his wounds/scars. And in this morning's reading, John tells us that when he appeared to the rest of the frightened disciples, he again showed them his wounds.

This tells us that resurrection did not erase the wounds — it *transformed* them. That's deeply relevant right now. Think of the wounds people are carrying... illness wounds; relationship wounds, racial wounds, economic wounds.

Easter doesn't pretend wounds aren't there or never happened, and it doesn't make them vanish. It *transforms* them.

Even the risen Christ still bears scars. Which means our scars are not evidence of God's absence — they may become evidence of God's redeeming power. Of God's healing.

Again, Jesus shows up, not in the halls of power, but in personal ways, to those who need it most. And sometimes in ways we don't recognize or expect, to be that face of God: to us, and to everyone. Which leads to...

The **second** gem (or another side of the one gem) is: the first words to come out of Jesus' mouth, when he appeared to people, were words of blessing, and encouragement. In our account from John, Jesus says to the fearful disciples, "Peace be with you." To Mary Magdalene, he simply says her name, "Mary." To just about everyone else, his first words are, "Don't be afraid." Fear not.

This is so important, and it tells us that Jesus understands our fear, our disappointment, our doubt, or our dismay. And because of that, he wants to bring assurance, peace, and hope. Jesus didn't appear to his disciples and say, "What's the matter with you?!? Don't you recognize me?? How come you're afraid?" He doesn't scold them. He speaks words of blessing, especially words that convey a sense of peace and wellbeing. Like the Celtic blessing.

I love it that Jesus says, "Peace be with you." John alerts us that this isn't the first or only time he says this. John tells us, "*Again*, he said to them... peace be with you."

Now, “Peace be with you” is a *common* greeting in the middle east and around the world, when people see each other in common places and situations. Yet, in *these* kinds of moments—moments of fear, disappointment, doubt, or dismay—it carries an *uncommon* blessing of assurance. Because Jesus is telling them—and us: everything is going to be alright. All things work together for good in time. Peace be with you, Jesus says.

I believe that the most important gift that you and I can *receive* right now, and the most important gift we can *give*, to each other and to those we encounter day to day, is God’s peace. Peace in the form of words of encouragement and blessing. Peace in the form of wordless action that benefits others. Peace in the form of simple presence, through something like patiently just being there for someone, or through a smile. Mother Teresa once said: “Peace begins with a smile.” She said, “Just smile at people. It isn’t difficult and it doesn’t cost you anything. God smiles at you all the time, so, smile at others on God’s behalf.”

God means to *bless us* with peace, and *send us forth* to *become* peace and to be peacemakers. Here is a great verse from the prophet Isaiah that speaks to this (55:12-13). This message is spoken to the people following a time of national disruption and despair. God speaks into their dark days and says:

*You shall go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle.*

What a wonderful, springtime, earthy message: the earth coming alive in joy and peace as we receive and give peace. We're going to sing this passage at the end of the service, and I hope we can take it with us when we go.

Here is another encouragement from Mother Teresa. This was found written on the wall of one of her children's homes in Calcutta, and I thought this would be a good word to us right now, as we go forth in peace as people of peace:

*People are often unreasonable, irrational and self-centered; love them anyway.
If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives; be kind anyway.
If you are honest and sincere, people may deceive you; be honest and sincere anyway.
What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight; create anyway.
If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous; be happy anyway.
The good you do today may be forgotten; do good anyway.*

Give the best you have, and it may never be enough; give your best anyway.

In the final analysis, it is between you and God; it was never between you and them anyway.

Maybe that can fix the news cycle, if enough people employ this attitude.

This provides a nice segue to our **last gem** (or, third side to one gem, since it proceeds from this): when Jesus appears to people, he almost always gives them something to do. He sends them on a little mission of some kind. To Mary Magdalene he said, “Go and tell the others.” In the account with Peter, following his restoration, Jesus tells him, “Take care of the people.” At the end of Matthew’s gospel, he gives a group of people what we call the great commission, to go and be good news people in the world. And in our account this morning he says, “As I have been sent, now I’m sending you.” To be good news people.

There’s a method to Jesus’ post-resurrection brilliance here, and it isn’t just to invite people to bask in the sunshine of Easter. By all means, do that—let your spirit be lifted and feel all the joy and blessings of this season. And, in addition to that he wants everyone to know that they have purpose. Everyone has a role, and some assignment to carry out.

And there is something dignifying about this. Being given something to do, some role to play, something that adds substance and purpose to a person’s life.

Remember, these were people who were afraid, disappointed, or discouraged. And Jesus helps them get through that by giving them something to do that will restore and build their confidence, and their hope—because they are going to spread goodness, as God’s peacemakers in their day-to-day lives. And in doing so, they will see and experience the goodness of others, and it can build and grow and—who knows—perhaps become a movement of some kind. And who doesn’t want to be part of a movement for good?!?

And if we don’t feel like we have a specific task we’re called to do, or don’t know what to do, then, as folks who attend here regularly hear me say from time to time: If you don’t know what to do... just do the next right thing right in front of you (repeat). One step at a time, one peaceful action at a time.

One last poem. It’s a short, playful poem by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer (she was the poet laureate of Colorado). Her poem is titled “Hope.”

Hope has holes
in its pockets.
It leaves little
crumb trails
so that we,
when anxious,
can follow it.

Hope’s secret:
it doesn’t know
the destination—
it knows only

that all roads
begin with one
foot in front
of the other.

The peace of Christ be with you!

Make Me a Channel of Your Peace