

Peace be With You
April 14, 2024

Let the light of Christ illuminate God's path for us in the name of the Creator, redeemer, and sustainer. Amen

I remember the first time I visited my sending parish in Marina, California. I had been meaning to visit for a while and was a little nervous to go. I hadn't been to church in a long time. I was just starting to find my way back to the Episcopal Church and was scared of what I might find. I knew the Priest, but I still had a lot of questions about community and Jesus at that point, if I'm being honest. I was definitely having a crisis of faith. I knew God in my heart, yet I was still trying to make sense of everything else.

I always sat in the back; it was where I felt most comfortable. I could slip out quietly right after the service was over or stay for coffee hour. There was a lot less pressure.

The congregation had a very robust passing of the peace, where everyone made it a point to get out of their pew to greet everyone else. The first time I experienced this, I was overwhelmed. I got used to it over time and came to look forward to it as time passed. There was something about acknowledging another person and wishing them peace that was in itself peaceful to me at the time.

It wouldn't be until later that I would really understand its significance.

In our text for today, we encounter Jesus appearing to the disciples. In an effort to calm the disciple's fears, Jesus greets them with "Peace be with you." In what feels like a normal response, they react in fear, thinking they have seen a ghost.

As Jesus continues to invite the disciples to see and feel that he is real, the disciple's fear turns to joy while still holding on to some disbelief.

Again, Jesus tries to show the disciples he is truly there with them and asks for some food.

As Jesus eats, the disciples' minds are again opened to the scriptures. This is like what we hear earlier in Luke when the disciples are on the road to Emmaus and Jesus shares a meal with the disciples.

The familiar act of eating together helps to remind the disciples of what Jesus had been teaching them, what they were being called to all along.

This final shift of the disciples to open and understanding minds and hearts seems to mark a shift in their being.

It is at this point that Jesus reminds them that they are to be the witnesses of all the good things that have been done and that they must continue in the world. Just as we are reminded, our witness to the world is to be aware of those around us. To not only understand our sin but the sin done on our behalf. Our witness can't simply be singular. This text isn't calling us into a singular witness but a corporate one. One of communal understanding and action.

As Jesus says, repentance and forgiveness of sins are to be proclaimed in his name to all nations. These teachings are intended to be considered for us as a community, just as there was a community of disciples. We, too, gather as a Christian community to witness God's love in the world.

In reading our text for today, it was hard not to see my own faith journey and the journeys of many others I've been blessed to share stories with along the way.

As I began my journey back to church, I was greeted by a community that took the act of offering the Peace very seriously. They knew it went beyond a one-time liturgical practice. They had worked to ensure that their robust peace-passing practice informed their hospitality and how they moved into the world.

The idea of welcoming everyone to the table and offering them a warm greeting of peace seemed ingrained in their beings. Seeing this practice in action so

that all who entered the church may know the transformative love of God in Christ truly opened my heart and mind to the kind of Christian I wanted to be in the world.

That community helped me see the complexities and benefits of life as a member of a Christian community. To know that as part of a community we can do more than as individual members. It also taught me that sometimes there are risks to being a part of a religious community. You may not always be popular or liked, yet you will find hope and peace within it in ways you may not find outside of it.

In our text today, we encounter Jesus and the disciples again eating together; we see an initial fright and alarm, then joy, mixed with disbelief, followed by understanding and open hearts and minds. This understanding leads the disciples on an uncharted path. As early believers, they were persecuted.

The path was hard. Jesus did not promise them security but salvation. Their faith had to develop over time as does ours. We are always works in progress. We must keep moving forward with hope, looking to be that witness we are called to in this text.

So, what still needs the presence of the risen Christ in our communities? As a community, how are we bearing witness to God's presence and work in the world? Are we reacting in fear when we encounter Christ in the world, or are we extending that all-important welcome, "peace be with you"?

As we continue to build our understanding of what it means to love as God loves us I hope we all remember to give ourselves some grace in that process.

My prayer for us is that we move forward this week with open hearts, open minds, and open spirits. So that the meal we come together to eat today brings new understandings to our lives allowing us to bear witness to God's love in the world.

Amen