

Year C, April 28, 2019
2 Easter
Christ Church, Mexia

"A hospital administrator was startled to see a patient fleeing down the hall out of the operating room, his loose hospital gown flapping in the breeze behind him. He stopped the patient and said, 'Do you mind telling me why you ran away from the operating room?' The patient looked at him with startled eyes and said, 'It was because of what the nurse said.' The administrator (asked), 'Oh, what did she say?' 'She said, Be brave! An appendectomy is quite simple.' The administrator (replied), 'Well, so what? It is quite simple. I would think that would comfort you.' (But) the patient replied, 'The nurse wasn't talking to me; she was talking to the doctor.'" (Hodgin, 150)

Fear is a very powerful and limiting emotion. We hear that the disciples were locked in a house in fear. Jesus was dead, at least they thought he was dead; they didn't know what they should do, where they should go; they were afraid that Jesus' fate may be awaiting them if they were found by the Jews. These were anxious times indeed. Sadly, not totally unlike the times we live in now.

And then we hear that Jesus appeared among them and said, "Peace be with you." Shalom; it was a traditional greeting. Do you think it helped them? Does it help you on Sunday morning when the officiant, I or whoever is leading the service, says on behalf of Jesus, "The peace of the Lord be always with you." Is it helpful, or has it just become just a part of the service, the chance when we get to greet and talk with everyone?

It didn't really help the disciples at first, because the disciples didn't recognize him, and that must have added to their fear for a moment, until he showed them his hands and side and they realized it was him - not a stranger who was good at entering locked rooms. But then he says it again, "peace be with you." Isn't peace to be desired? Sought after? Cherished? - especially in our hectic and fearful lives? - especially if we think of peace as: "...that calm of mind that is not ruffled by adversity, overclouded by a remorseful conscience, or disturbed by fear." That's how we are talking about peace today.

Dr. Denis Burke, often referred to as the Doctor of Wisdom, says there are five common fears: fear of rejection, fear of criticism, fear of failure on the job or in business, financial fear, and fear of decisions. I

would add fear of any uncertainty we have about the future. I'm sure that we could develop a longer list, and I suspect that on any given Sunday morning we are all dealing with one of these or some other type of fear. So, I wonder if we find relief in the peace of Christ, or whether we are too controlled or limited by that fear?

Maybe we don't want to acknowledge the fear – denial is a good defense mechanism. Or maybe we are too intent on secular greetings, catching up on the latest news with our friends, making plans for after church or during the week, checking out what others are wearing, or doing other things that distract us from truly experiencing the peace of Christ here.

This peace I am talking about is the peace that Paul says, "passes all understanding." It is much better than the absence of noise, the momentary relief from our worry or fear, or the momentary feeling of well-being. It is a gift that was purchased at great cost. It is a peace that assures us that we can never be separated from God, except perhaps by our own unwillingness to accept relationship with God.

It is a peace that sustained the first Apostles and the early church even during its many acts of martyrdom, and it is a peace that has enabled the church to survive periods of dissension and divisiveness throughout its history. It is a peace that must be shared, not just here during the liturgy, but with all of Mexia and beyond. It is a peace that can calm our fears and bolster our faith, which allows us ultimately to conquer our fears.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh puts it this way in her book, *Gift from the Sea*: "I want first of all – in fact, as an end to these other desires – to be at peace with myself. I want a singleness of eye, a purity of intention, a central core to my life that will enable me to carry out these obligations and activities as well as I can. I want in fact – to borrow from the language of the saints – to live 'in grace' as much of the time as possible. I'm not using this term in a strictly theological sense. By grace I mean inner harmony, essentially spiritual, which can be translated into outward harmony. I'm seeking perhaps what Socrates asked for in the prayer from the Phaedrus when he said, 'May the outward and inward man be as one.' I would like to achieve a state of inner spiritual grace from which I could function and give as I was meant to in the eye of God." Sounds like peace to me.

When you hear The Peace today and on following Sundays may you be blessed with truly experiencing and feeling Christ's greeting to you.

As-Salaam-Alaikum. Shalom. Peace be with you.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.
Amen.