

Second Sunday after Easter April 27, 2014 Christ Church

Jesus came and stood among them and said “Peace be with you”

Many years ago a movie theatre in small town upstate agreed to preview the documentary film Shoah (Holocaust). Phil a WWII veteran who served in Germany was invited by a friend to attend. Phil wore a light jacket with a patch on the front with the insignia of the unit he served in during the war. During an intermission everyone went out to the lobby to mingle. A woman about Phil's age walked across the room to where Phil was standing and just gazed at him, or more accurately at the insignia on his jacket. She reached out with her hand and touched the insignia gently: “I remember this.” She paused and then said the name of the concentration camp she was in. Phil's looked at her in amazement and said “I was there.” He and his unit were the first break through the locked gates moving from barracks to barracks pushing open the doors liberating the prisoners. In the middle of the lobby prisoner and liberator embracing wept in each other's arms.

“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.”

I bristled again this year at the phrase and the doors were locked for fear of the Jews. If only this verse and others like it had not been included in the gospels would the treatment of Jews by Christians over the centuries have been better?

Believing that the scriptures contain everything necessary for salvation what on earth are we to do with this verse other than what we have done with it over the centuries?

Narrowing the focus of the sentence we see the dynamic more clearly in fear the disciples locked the door. They were afraid that what happened to Jesus would happen to them. The locked door was about avoiding the same fate. They wanted a safe quiet life. Don't we all?

Jesus cannot be blocked by locked doors whether the doors are physical or the metaphorical doors of our heart. He enters into this moment of fear and says Shalom. He shows them his hands and his side and only then do the disciples see Him and rejoice. The disciples recognize Jesus by his wounds, by the evidence of his suffering.

It is only after the disciples recognize Jesus by the evidence of his suffering that they are ready to be sent out into the world just as Jesus was sent into the world.

The community, the church is given the Holy Spirit and is commissioned and empowered to be a community of reconciliation, of forgiveness and also a community that is empowered to retain sins of any...not sure I like that bit

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either....perhaps because I have seen this power used the same wrongheaded way as the phrase for fear of the Jews.

The question on the gospel poses to each of us on this second Sunday of is Easter where is our locked door we hide behind in fear, seeking a safe life? The good news of the gospel is that Jesus intends on showing up in exactly where you don't want him to come and he will speak the word Shalom. The peace calms the fear so that we might recognize the wounds of his suffering in others.

Once we see him present in the suffering of others we too are commissioned and sent to be reconcilers. We too are commissioned and sent to remind those who will not cease to cause suffering that we see and we hold them in prayer and work against their actions until they stop....I think that is what Jesus meant when he said if you retain the sins of any they are retained.

It is a risky business being sent and the peace we receive may not feel like it matches the disruption we experience in our own lives as we give up safety for sanctity. Yet this is the peace God gives which the world cannot. We are called to disrupt the illusions that any person or group is the cause of our problems.

At ten am tomorrow morning in Israel the sirens will sound for two minutes and the children of Israel around the world will remember those who were killed in the holocaust. I ask all of us to consider intentionally pausing from whatever you are doing and in silence remember. I believe in so doing this is a way of retaining our own culpability as a Christian community for things done and let undone that we might turn and be healed and fulfill our commission as reconcilers in the world wherever reconciliation is needed.

Shalom