

Acts 3:12-19  
Psalm 4  
1 John 3:1-7  
Luke 24:36b-48

The Rev. Susan B. Pinkerton  
Interim Priest in Charge, St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church  
Corona Del Mar, CA

### The Easter Gift of Peace

Fear makes us do strange things.

A doctor, a lawyer, a little boy and a priest were out for a Sunday afternoon flight on a small private plane. Suddenly, the plane developed engine trouble. In spite of the best efforts of the pilot, the plane started to go down. Finally, the pilot grabbed a parachute, yelled to the passengers that they had better jump, and then he bailed out.

Unfortunately, there were only three parachutes remaining. The doctor grabbed one and said, "I'm a doctor, I save lives, so I must live," and jumped out.

The lawyer then said, "I'm a lawyer and lawyers are the smartest people in the world. I deserve to live." He also grabbed a parachute and jumped.

The priest looked at the little boy and said, "My son, I've lived a long and full life. You are young and have your whole life ahead of you. Take the last parachute and live in peace."

The little boy handed the parachute back to the priest and said, "Not to worry, Father. The 'smartest man in the world' just took off with my back pack!"<sup>1</sup>

Fear makes us do strange things. We witness this with Jesus' followers just days after the empty tomb is discovered.

It is a crowded and noisy room. It has only been a few days since that horrendous Friday when Jesus was crucified, and his tomb was found empty two days later. The disciples' fear of arrest has sent them into hiding behind locked doors. The air is electric with fear and confusion. Everyone is talking over each other as they share fantastic rumors that Jesus is alive! In the midst of this chaos Cleopas bursts into the room, still trying to catch his breath, to talk about seeing Jesus near Emmaus. Suddenly, Jesus is standing in the midst of them. How can this be?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jokes4us.com/morekiddiejokes/alawyeronaplanejoke.html>.

They have been listening to Cleopas' fantastic account plus all that Mary Magdalene and Peter shared just moments before. And now Jesus is here in the same room!

Jesus greets them with "Peace be with you." In the midst of this frenzied atmosphere, it seems that is exactly what is needed. He knows they are afraid and cannot take in all that they are seeing. So, Jesus tries to comfort his friends as he has many times in the past. Remember he knows them better than they know themselves. He asks, "Why are you frightened? Why do doubts arise in your hearts?" (Luke 24:38) To show that he is not an aberration or ghost, but a real resurrected physical body Jesus shows them the marks of the nails that were driven into his hands and feet. He lifts up his robe and shows them where the sword pierced his side. Then, of all things he asks for a snack. He sits down and eats a bit of fish. There can be no doubt that Jesus is made of flesh and blood, eating, walking and talking like everyone else. But he can also walk-through locked doors and appear in different places in no time at all. It is no wonder that "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering..." (Luke 24:41).

How often do we find ourselves crouching behind lock doors of our own making, fearful of the many uncertainties, chaos and complexities that are so much a part of our life today?<sup>2</sup> It is so easy to get caught up in our desperate need for a sense of security. This is especially true this past year with the advent of the global pandemic. But even before we ever heard of COVID our modern culture seems to thrive on a sense of fear. Daily we are assaulted with scary news of mass shootings, domestic terrorism, a widening income gap between the haves and have not's, climbing costs of medical care, growing devastation caused by climate change. On a personal level we may be fearful of getting a terrible diagnosis, or worrying about having enough money for retirement, or, wondering whether I will lose my job and if so, can I find another? Will there be someone to take care of me in my old age without burdening my children? We all have our own laundry list of worries no matter our age or situation; young, old, middle age, wealthy, blue collar or middle class.

Overwhelming fear comes in all shapes and sizes. It feeds our anxieties and drives what we consume; how and where we live; the people we associate and those we avoid. The result of our fear-based culture is that we are robbed of living. And we forfeit what it means to be fully alive. Like Jesus' followers who were terrified of what they had seen and heard, we too are in great need of the same peace that Jesus greets them with as he appears in their midst. The peace that Jesus offers is not of this world. The peace that Jesus offers is like the balm of Gilead. It soothes our trembling, fearful hearts; it calms our racing minds, and it assures us that nothing is greater or more powerful than God's love for us. No matter what happens in our lives, no matter how wonderful or how terrible, love always has the last say.

This is what Easter is all about – the promise of new and abundant life. It is not about fear, anxiety and death. When we dare to risk placing our faith in this promise – then we open ourselves and our hearts to God's peace that passes all understanding. The disciples are witnesses to this promise as they see the Risen Jesus appear before them in a locked room, just days after his death on the cross, showing his scars and eating a piece of fish. Through God's

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<sup>2</sup> Nancy R. Blakely," Luke 24:36b-48, Pastoral Perspective, *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Year B, Volume 2, Lent through Eastertide. David L. Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008, 424-428.

abundant love, in ways we do not understand, we are redeemed from death and all that robs us of life. This is our salvation. And Jesus leads the way. All our fears, anxieties, doubts and human frailties are somehow made whole, just as God intended from the very beginning. God's love prevails, even in the midst of loss.

Several years ago, my father died at home after a long illness. I recall that after we said our final goodbyes with my mother, my three daughters and the hospice chaplain, we went outside in the backyard of my parent's home to catch our breaths. It was a cool, crisp autumn day with an incredibly clear blue sky. Without saying a word, I walked over to the chiminea (a free-standing fireplace/oven with a front opening for firewood and a small chimney at the top) and placed some sweet-smelling pinon wood in and lit a fire. We all watched in silence as the kindling caught fire and smoke began to billow out of the chiminea. It all seemed so natural. Without thinking we formed a circle around the fire and watched together as the smoke circled upward, spiraling upward toward the blue infinite sky. I thought of the ancient Israelites that burned incense in the Temple, allowing the smoke to float upwards as a reminder of how our prayers are lifted up toward God. As we watched the fragrant smoke whirl upward toward the heavens I recall being overcome with a strange sense of serenity, of peace – a peace not of this world. I knew that somehow the Risen Christ was in the midst of us, holding it all, the sadness, the loss and the promise that love endures when all else falls away. And I knew that somehow it would be alright.

May God's peace be with you all.

Amen.