

4.12.2026 Second Sunday of Easter
Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31
“Sent with Peace”

Rev. Ali Rode

“Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.” Good morning beloved Children of God.

My sermon writing this week found me somewhere between “the Dark Side of the Moon” and if we are keeping with the Pink Floyd references, although I will admit I’m not really a fan, a lesser known song by the same artist, “the Dogs of War”.

We firstly, have this spectacular play-by-play of the human experience witnessing four incredibly brave individuals who decided to commit together to doing something none of them could do on their own, to travel to new corners of space and capture the imagination of the planet which they hail from, opening new horizons to the apex of science and our own being and community. Commander Wiseman recalled regarding the mission, “What we really hoped in our soul, is that we could for just a moment have the world pause and remember that this is a beautiful planet, and a very special place in our universe.” And as a pastor I love that he said “soul”—because witnessing creation is a spiritual experience, which calls to us.

Simultaneously this week we have witnessed the aggression of the challenges in the complex interrelated political, social, financial, and environmental controls with decisions regarding the safety, security, desire for military force with the powers that be in our nation and across the world. Now, some of these challenges have more recent developments, but some have been ongoing across our globe for some time.

In this tension between seeing our planet afar and being enraptured by its beauty, and witnessing necessary bravery of those who serve or live in areas of brutal conflict, that “zooming out and zooming in” and tension, and that beauty and destruction— it is a faithful response to wish for peace.

And peace, is where I want to focus our sermon on today: how we encounter peace, what its origin is, and what our response might be. But first, a little about the encounter with Jesus, the disciples and Thomas to give us a framework.

The story in John’s Gospel this morning is often referred to as “Doubting Thomas”. The quick version of the story is the disciples see Jesus after he is resurrected, and they are rejoicing. Later on in the story, Christ is no longer with them, Thomas arrives. See, Thomas was not with them at first when Jesus came. The disciples tell Thomas what happened. And Thomas says, “If I see it, then I’ll believe it.” That’s a paraphrase. A week passes by.

Then the disciples are with Thomas, the doors are locked, and somehow Jesus comes in through these locked doors and presents himself to them. Thomas sees the wounds of his resurrected body. Thomas believes by confessing, “My Lord, and my God”— my leader, and the one who made me, the one I follow and the divine one. Thomas actually believes!

Jesus says to the disciples, and I believe these words are also directed to the original audience of the gospel, as well as ourselves, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet they have come to believe.”

I reject the title of “Doubting Thomas”, it’s not in the original scriptures. It’s more a title we put upon this scripture, because the story really is an apex of Thomas’ faith, of seeking for truth when the disciples bring their witness to him, him wanting to see Jesus and to believe. Then, practically, why should we focus on Thomas’ doubt when of course the other disciples believed— Jesus was with them! If I was left out, I would want to see some kind of evidence, of course. Thomas is asking for evidence as part of his seeking faith. So Thomas gets a ‘bad rap’ I think. Doubt means we are seeking or searching, or questioning. That’s normal! All people of faith go through that. There is no shame in it, it is part of our human experience. We are with Thomas in this. We want some evidence of Jesus’ true presence.

That’s often where our consideration of the passage rests, on focusing on Thomas and our own belief, but within this story there are important lessons regarding peace which are timely for us today.

1. Peace is something that dwells with us.
2. We receive peace as a gift of the Holy Spirit
3. Once we receive peace, we are sent to pass it on.

1. Peace is something that dwells with us. When Jesus arrives among the disciples he first says, “Peace be with you.” The key word I want to highlight is “with”. If something is “with” that means it dwells, lives among, is a part of our experience. We witness it, and are embraced by it. I suppose that also means, it could be something we are searching for and desire. Peace be *with* you.

In Galatians 5:22-24 when we have a listing of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, peace is the third mentioned after love and joy. Fruit of the Holy Spirit is not something we can grow. Much like a fruit tree, for example. None of us has the master knowledge to start with absolutely nothing and create a tree, right? We have to start with something, a seed, a sapling, a graft, something because God creates the trees. We manage them, plant them, nurture them, and grow them. The same is true of the fruit of the Holy Spirit and peace. God has created peace, it is gifted it to us. It is not something we can manufacture, control, or can create on our own. Peace is not that way, it is a gift from God. We are stewards of peace God gives us and we can enjoy the gift of peace God has given us. Jesus says, “Peace be *with* you” so that the disciples might receive, but also anticipate this ongoing presence of peace in their lives. And so it’s a great thing to say. As a pastor, I like to say it, “Peace be with you.”

2. We receive Peace as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Later in the story, Jesus repeats the words, “Peace be with you,” but then he adds to these words by breathing onto the disciples. In a time post-pandemic time, the idea of someone breathing on us might seem undesirable. We might be comforted by the breath of a small child sleeping on our shoulder, or perhaps of the sigh of a loved one while receiving a hug who is experiencing grief— but Jesus breathes onto his disciples. This breath is comforting, not because of the wind itself, but because of the big story behind the understanding of the breath itself.

The biblical words we have for spirit are similar in the Hebrew Bible. We have ruach which means breath, wind, and energy In the Christian Scriptures we have the Greek, pneuma (πνεῦμα) meaning breath or spirit. Our first encounter with the word ruach is in Genesis 1:2 which describes the Spirit of God hovering over the surface of the waters before it was created. Later in the creation narratives we have dust of the earth where God breathes into it creating Adam, whose name means earth or soil. The breath is what animates Adam. The word pneuma is throughout the Gospels and Epistles, and just one example in 1 Corinthians 12, the writer

says, "There are varieties of gifts but one same Spirit." It talks about the gifts of the Spirit, the gifts that we bring as we are the Church.

It's the Holy Spirit which animates us, which gives us life, which gives us breath. (Breathe) Sometimes we just need to remind ourselves to breathe, that God gives us the breath of life. And through the spirit, we are given gifts. Therefore Peace is a gift from God, that dwells with us.

Thirdly, once we receive this peace, once we are given life, as peace is dwelling with us we are sent to pass it on. It's not just for us to feel good and happy. This peace we receive is then something we are sent. As Jesus sends his disciples out to forgive, and minister with that peace empowered by the Holy Spirit, inspired by his breath of life. He says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Now many of you know that my coming here as Associate Pastor in December was an ecumenical agreement where you the church called me to be your pastor. We went through a discernment process to be called here which is a very special verb, "call." I am a United Methodist Clergy person which means that I am "sent" by my bishop. So there's an understanding of "call" in the ELCA and in the UMC we have this understanding of being "sent". So simultaneously, I have the blessing of being called to be here and then my bishop has sent me to be here. And aren't we all called and sent? Because God has a mission for all of us. In this time and place by your grace and by the work of the ecumenical agreement we are able to be called and chosen and then sent together into our community.

So we have this opportunity we can experience peace, we can nurture a life of peace- so that we might not just nurture it within ourselves, but also breathe life into others. Later in the Gospel says, "and that through believing you may have life in his name." That's what it's all about, life.

In our worship together, every time we gather, we have the opportunity to say "Peace be with you." It's during the passing of the peace. It happens during communion. I want to invite you in a practical way when we do pass the peace, I think its easy to go through the motions. It is not necessary to have touch or hold hands, but make eye contact and really understand we understand theologically in that time that God is using us as a conduit of peace for one another. We've said our confession and forgiveness. We come to the table. We ask for God's blessing. We say as clergy, "The Lord be with you." Saying "Peace be with you is this opportunity for God to use you as a conduit of peace for each other, and then as we depart from this place we are sent out in ministry for the whole world.

I think so often when have this desire for peace we have to remember, that that peace does not come with a journey to the far reaches of the earth. Peace does not come from some certain global agreements, but that peace comes from God. And we trust that peace is something that dwells with us, that we receive peace as a gift of the Holy Spirit and that once we receive that peace we are sent to pass it on. And, may peace be with you. Amen.