

04.07.24 ~ Easter 2
“Peace Be with You”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Isaiah 12:2-6 (NIV)

² Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.”

³ With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

⁴ In that day you will say: “Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted.

⁵ Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world.

⁶ Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.”

Psalms 133 (NIV)

A Song of ascents. Of David.

¹ How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!

² It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down on the collar of his robe.

³ It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

Leader: These Are Words of God’s Assurance. All: Thanks be to God!

John 20:19-31 (NIV)

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” ²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them.

Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

The Purpose of John’s Gospel

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Luke 24:36b-48 (NIV)

³⁶ . . . Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

³⁷ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” ⁴⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹ And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate it in their presence. ⁴⁴ He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

Leader: These Words of Jesus Are for Us, Church. All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Almighty God, we come to you this week after Christ’s resurrection feeling like things are back to normal yet knowing that we are different; we are saved by your blood on that cross and your sacrifice for our sin. The disciples were still numb, trying to make sense of the events. As we place ourselves in their position, let us imagine the grief and the joy of loss yet victory. We thank you for sending your son, Jesus, to teach us, lead us, suffer, and bring us eternal life. We rejoice at the resurrection and seek understanding through these scriptures; may your voice be heard through this messenger. Amen.

Hallelujah! Yes, He is Risen! Hope you had a lovely Easter and week after, even though it feels like winter in April. Thank you again to all who helped create a meaningful Holy Week and Easter day; to our volunteers who assisted in various roles and our instrumentalists and vocalists who enhanced our time together. Last week we heard Mary Magdalene’s testimony “I have seen the Lord!” The two scriptures from Isaiah and the Psalms help us to see the continuity of God’s plan from the

prophet Isaiah and Jesus' ancestor David that we should be praising God for his mighty acts past and present, in both life and death, being grateful for his blessing and mercy through Jesus.

It is traditional in years past that this week we study post-resurrection passages from the disciples' and "Doubting" Thomas' point of view. However, this year as a church, we are "Finding Beauty" in the broadest sense of the words, so we will focus instead on what the risen, but not yet ascended, Jesus says to his fearful disciples: "Peace be with you." Peace is a more uplifting concept than doubt, so I refer us back to our key verse this year: ". . . whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things (Phil 4:8 NIV)."

"Peace be with you"—I asked myself how could someone, even a divine Christ, say those comforting words after all he had been through? It is impossible for us to know the excruciating pain yet heavenly reward he faced. So instead, let's put ourselves in the disciples' shoes (or sandals). In the John passage for today, Jesus had passed through the upper room door and stood among his disciples (imagine it was **you** in that room!). He merely greeted them as if nothing was different from the night of the last supper together! His first words were "Shalom" (שלום), which is not just hello, but is really a blessing upon the receiver conveying a state of affairs. This peace is not meant to be simply an absence of war or conflict, but rather it asks God's blessing of wholeness or completeness for the one who receives it, almost more of a "May God's Peace, love, mercy, and justice be showered upon you." While "Shalom" is still a normal greeting, Jesus understands that in this context

of his disciples and friends hunkering down in fear behind closed doors after a terrible and confusing week, he needs to calm and reassure them.

I think his humanity also wanted fellowship with them after his ordeal, yet as their teacher he was willing to help explain what they all had been through together as a community of believers. Even though Jesus shows his disciples the wounds of the crucifixion, the scars, and the nail prints in his hands, he takes more time to comfort them. In both the Luke and the John passages, Jesus' post-resurrection body was substantial enough to sit down and teach his disciples, yet even Luke, a physician, confronts the visitation as if Jesus is a ghost! Not one like Casper or one of the Ghostbusters' troublemaking plasma entities, but a deeply personal apparition. This type of appearance has been documented scientifically and psychologically to many after the loss of a loved one. Personally, I had an interactive dream with my mom at the foot of my bed two nights after she died, and our conversation was memorable and comforting. Yes, perhaps it was my imagination and grief coping mechanism in a dream state, but we know that Jesus' power to appear was real because it was not just one time! Sources say between eight and thirteen appearances of Jesus after the Resurrection and before the Ascension, but since he appeared once to over 500 people, some claim over 500 appearances!

The one we read about today is unique because he breathes the Holy Spirit into them as a community. Matthew Henry states: "The Spirit is unleashed into the world in a new way and begins to bring about new life where he finds faith. The disciples enter into a new phase in their life with God, but it is not yet the time of their active witness, as it will be from Pentecost on." This is a first commissioning, if you will, a type of

ordaining. And that's why his opening remark is so important. For them to receive the Holy Spirit and go on into the world as his apostles, teaching and preaching, they must be courageous, unified in spirit and purpose, and must be people of peace so others will welcome them. The old days of fearmongering, fire and brimstone-filled Bible tracts stating you're going to hell if you don't repent (whether true or not) are not helpful to today's culture and younger generations. They respond to people of peace, justice, love, and mercy. We can reach them through the new Food Mission or other activities in and beyond the church. We can take very active steps to be in the community and share our faith by example.

We must not be confused by spirits and "ghosts" in the language here. Both writers are saying that Jesus has the divine quality of peace and can share it with the world through the Holy Spirit. Even Mary's vision of Jesus at the tomb was filled with peace, not fear. She felt his love as he called her by name. Before the Luke passage we read, the disciples were on the road to Emmaus when they encountered Jesus. As in John's Gospel, he shows them his hands and feet and scars. He reassures them by wishing them peace, but what surprised me was how he asked them for something to eat! Let us remember this particular spot as we serve others with the New United Gospel Food Mission now on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays of each month, between 11 am and 2 pm. I will have a flyer on the bulletin board soon and inserts about how to designate funds. We do have a table in the fellowship hall labeled to collect non-perishable food. Checks payable to NBMBC-Food Mission are also accepted – just place in the offering plate, and we will be sure to route them to Pastor Ed's

account managers. As you give generously, please pray the words Jesus uttered: “Peace Be with You!” The amount of stress for the unhoused or underemployed is huge and creates a vulnerability to illegal gains or poor choices, so let’s pray for peace for all served and all who serve in this way. The Messiah lives! Salvation is the beauty of both the cross and the resurrection. Jesus is alive! Shalom! And Amen! ||

Let us pray. Dear God, the Father of Jesus, our Messiah, we thank you for the gospel stories to help us understand your love for us, your teachings, and these momentous appearances. May we be people of peace called to share your love, justice, and mercy. Continue to strengthen our faith as you did Thomas’ and the disciples’ faith, especially as we participate in the Lord’s Supper. Bless these elements as we remember your sacrifice, and give us courage to be your voice, heart, hands, and feet in this challenging world, as we pray in Jesus’ name, **Amen.**