

The words we just sang in the beautiful hymn by David Haas echo the words of the risen Christ to the disciples locked in that upper room. Thank you, Christine, for choosing this hymn for this morning. "Peace be with you," Jesus said to them.

About the last thing in the world those men and women felt was peaceful. John records that this event in the upper room took place on the very same day that the women discovered the empty tomb and the disciples ran to the place and saw that he was not there. Then, after what must have been a tumultuous day, wondering what could have happened to the body of Jesus, and trying to keep out of sight of the Jewish leadership so that the same fate that befell Jesus wouldn't happen to them...finally, they retreated to this room upstairs and locked the door.

Peace? They weren't thinking about peace! They were probably trying to figure out how to safely get out of Jerusalem without being caught by the authorities.

Thomas went out on some sort of errand? He wasn't with the others. And then there was Jesus standing among them saying "Peace be with you." Sure enough, "Peace be with you" was a common phrase of greeting at the time. We use it pretty commonly too here. If you've been attending Trinity for any length of time you are probably pretty comfortable greeting your neighbors in the pews with the greeting of peace.

But this use of the phrase by Jesus tells us that he means something other than a casual greeting. He wants to communicate peace, give his friends peace, and call peace into the room and into this fraught situation. Giving the disciples the gift of the Spirit and telling them that they are being sent out just as Jesus was sent out gives them their mission – their calling. They are to forgive or to not forgive; **they** will have to do this now, and **they** are the ones who will be pronouncing peace to their neighbors, telling them that the Spirit of God gives them the opportunity for Life and a different way of living in the world.

Thomas finally arrives in the next scene, and Jesus calms him down too and helps him to come to a Spirit filled, peaceful and believing place. He utters the remarkable phrase, "My Lord and my God."

Using that gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives we try to cultivate a sense of Inner peace and then are more readily able to give peace to others. We know that being anxious is not healthy for our body or our spirit, and is not what we are called to be. And we know that Jesus has a mission for us too. As he sent them so he sends us!

So, are you ready to go? Where will we promote peace first. In our home? In our neighborhood or town? How about in our state? That's a lot to ask. What can we do? We're each only one person in states with populations in the millions. And let's not even mention the world. We're helpless, right?

No, we're not helpless. We just have to start where we are. In our reading today from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter says to the authorities, "We must obey God rather than any human authority." Peter fully believes that the Holy Spirit was given to him and all who believe, by Jesus, and that their sole objective for the rest of their lives is to preach the Good News of reconciliation and peace through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The Spirit has given him this mission. And the disciples are having success in Jerusalem.

That was one brave bunch of men and women. Let me tell you about another bunch of brave men and women.

An article on BBC news was brought to my attention about a neighborhood called Katawapitia near Colomobo in Sri Lanka. The article is titled "Fighting back with peace" if you want to look for it later. The families there in that multicultural neighborhood suffered a great loss in the bombings on Easter Sunday. The residents of Katawapitiya, which is over 150 years old, are determined to not let the tragedy pull apart their community.

Glenn, a resident there, tells about three people of his family that died last Sunday at St. Sebastian's Catholic Church. And he said that the neighborhood came together to mourn together and to support each other – to a radical extent! They had trouble finding the bodies of their loved ones at first because there were so many dying and wounded in various hospitals. Residents accompanied the family and fanned out to all the hospitals to find the their neighbors.

Residents helped with cleaning the house of the family affected, they swept the streets and put up white flags (which look like long looped ribbons) in honor of the dead. Some offered rooms in their own homes to accommodate the visitors who would be coming for the funerals. Many residents cooked for the family and for the funeral.

Glenn explains that the neighborhood has always been diverse. There are people of many different cultures and religions living together in Katawapitia. Christians, Muslims, Buddhists all live and work together.

Yes, there has been racial tension in Sri Lanka, but the country has been also been a melting pot for centuries and Sinhalese, Tamils, Burghers and Maylays all live together.

Of course, there have been antagonisms between the cultures and peoples of Sri Lanka and it is a complicated situation with much history. But the people who live in **this** neighborhood are trying to follow a different path. Glenn says, "Everyone wants to help someone. The Muslims who live over here are just people. They are innocent and need to be protected. Nobody wants a war."

Glenn says that these bombings have been devastating for his community and for the country, but "We are going to show these terrorists that we are not afraid of them. We are going to fight back against them. But not the way they do. We will fight back with peace."<sup>i</sup>

What an inspiration for us and for the world. When one has peace in one's heart then we have the ability to love one another. That can break the cycle of violence and retribution. If we can become reconciled to each other and with God, a mighty task and a challenging goal, we **will** find the peace that God intends for us, and Christ brought us.

What can you and I do within ourselves, and within our neighborhoods to fight for peace the way Glenn and his neighbors are doing?

Peace before us, peace behind us, peace under our feet. Peace within us, peace over us, let all around us be peace.<sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> "Fighting Back with Peace," from [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com), 4/27/2019

<sup>ii</sup> "Song of Peace," David Haas, *Wonder Love and Praise*, #791.