

Shalom!
Luke 24:13-16; 28-45

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Shalom! Peace be with you.

There is something almost surreal in Luke's presentation of Jesus as resurrected. Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." Jesus offers words of blessing, a gift of peace in a world of turmoil. The gospel of John makes the same point. In life and on the other side of death, Jesus offers peace: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

That's the Easter message! Peace be with you. Jesus lives! This message is in stark contrast to this week's events: The fall of the I-Man Don Imus and his controversial words about the Rutgers's women's basketball team; the accident that almost killed the Governor of New Jersey, riding without a seatbelt in a state where not wearing a seatbelt is against the law; the continued violence in Iraq...the dismissal of charges against members of the Duke Lacrosse Team and the questionable behavior of the North Carolina District Attorney who handled the case; the DNA findings for Anna Nicole Smith's daughter's father; the continued violence in Iraq; Iran's nuclear agenda; Attorney General Gonzales...This litany is endless

Of course wonderful things happened this past week: from the personal high of Zach Johnson winning the Masters to the communal high of Elina, Carla and Miguel celebrating their family life. I bet you could name any number of things that witnessed to the power of hope that took place this week. Unfortunately we tend to focus on those who shout the loudest, who abuse the power they have to disturb the peace of others, who make war, and those who spout words of hate based on the boundary lines of race, sex and class.

Still, Jesus stands in our midst and says Peace be with you! Incredible! What are we to make of this peace? How are we to practice resurrection in a world where peace seems in short supply? What was Jesus trying to say?

The word for peace that appears here in Luke and elsewhere in John's gospel is *eirene* [i-ray'-nay] which means -be at peace (have, live in) peace, live peaceably. Before I wax eloquent on the nature of the word *eirene*, I need to remind all of us that when Jesus rose from the dead, he was still Jewish. A no-brainer right? Except the word most of us think of when we think of peace, *eirene* [i-ray'-nay], is a Greek word

What Jesus actually said in life and on the other side of death was *shalom*, the translation of *shalom* is rightly peace be with you, but in distinction from *eirene* {i-ray'-nay} *shalom* also means "well-being" be with you. The Hebrew word for peace implies completeness, fulfillment, wellbeing, and harmony; so when the Hebrew Scriptures refer to conditions related to peace: they are speaking of matters of safety, health and prosperity for individuals and nations. The Easter message is rooted in the power of hope—the power to change our life, the power to experience wellness. Listen again to Oliver's words: (From the poem, When Death Comes)

"...When it's over, I want to say all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.

When it's over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.

I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,
or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world”

The Easter message is be well; practice well-being in your life and in community and resurrection will change your life. In life and on the other side of death Jesus continues to be a healer; to create well-being by liberating people from our worst fears and our most rehearsed nightmares. He also challenges us to claim the power of well-being.

In her book of Blessings Poet Marcia Falk reveals the heart of Jewish life. She writes,

“If you are looking for the heart and soul and bones of Hebrew prayer, you will find them all in the blessing.' Blessing (b'rakhah) is a special kind of prayer, a particular invocation of God's power, a way of creating new power and new life, a way of enriching our awareness of what we have, who we are, and who we may become, while reconnecting us with the past.”

Let me say that again: “a blessing is a particular invocation of God's power, a way of creating new power and new life, a way of enriching our awareness of what we have, who we are, and who we may become, while reconnecting us with the past.”

Shalom is the simplest form of this prayer...it speaks of peace and well-being, an ancient greeting uttered upon meeting another as well as departing from that person's presence. Jesus blessed his disciples with well-being—he did not teach them how to accept him as their Lord and Savior. Twice in his ministry he refers to himself as the great physician. In Mark 2:17 when his opponents attacked him for associating with tax collectors and "sinners Jesus reminded them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." According to Luke: When Jesus gave his first sermon in his hometown synagogue of Nazareth, he said, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"

On Easter Sunday I asked if you were paying attention to your story as well as the Jesus story. When I speak this way, I am hoping upon hope that you will experience Jesus as a liberating force in your life. A healing force!

There are plenty of churches that are already turning to the lectionary images of Jesus as the great sufferer, the one who suffers on our behalf to save us from sin...In due time Jesus will morph into the great deliverer, the one who descends from the clouds to judge the living and the dead. But that won't happen in this church. The only way to truly see the saving power of Jesus is to experience it in this life. In Greek and in Hebrew the word translated to save means to heal.

That means that we come to know Jesus not in moments of fear but in moments of hope... where the past is released not buried, let go of not repressed. “Shalom be with you' means practice healing...seek wellness, in body, mind and spirit. Practice well-being. The power Jesus passes unto us is the power to heal.

Yesterday, those of us who were able to attend the adoption and baptismal celebration with Carla and Elina and Miguel saw the healing power of community in action. Time and again the healing power of hospitality and openness was on display... At one point I whispered to Ann... we're dancing, in church, together, and I'm the minister—the feeling of being home in my life and in my ministry was palpable.

In the past several months I've heard myself say more than once. “This is the church I've been waiting for all my life.” I call us the community of Christ/Christa because I see us as a community where the equality of women and men thrives, where justice is served and where well-being is honored. Well-being does not mean living a pain free existence—it means living with and actively practicing the healing power of love

Well-being is intimately tied to the presence of grace at work in our lives. We receive well-being as participatory grace, that is we must care enough about ourselves and our neighbor to experience well-being in the fullness of who we are and who we are becoming. Well-being, is a state of health where we integrate all dimensions of our embodied selves (physical, emotional, and spiritual) and engage in loving relationships that foster mutuality and well-being in others.

When you and I experience well-being three things are noticeable. We are able to act on our own behalf—we use our power wisely. We are able to express our own creativity—we allow the uniqueness of who we are to shine. We are fully aware of our personal responsibility to promote the well-being of all--we know we are interconnected with all of life and we celebrate that interconnectedness daily.

When God's healing spirit is unleashed within us, we become healing healers [not wounded healers]...people on the move, people who say goodbye to the past and hello to the future. People who say yes to life, and let go of childhood fears...People who live with hope, not hopelessness. People who allow our imaginations to be guided by images of love, acceptance and well-being, communal well-being; well-being that builds communities where God still speaks words of welcome, words of forgiveness and words of healing.

Why does this matter? I continue to experience healing because I have come to understand God wants all of us to flourish. To be a healed healer you start with what you know—pain, fear, hopelessness—and you begin to let it go. You take a step in the direction of wellness and you seek out every opportunity to let your pain go. You breathe yes; you breathe hope; you breathe resurrection.

I invite you now to come forward—those who wish to begin this process—and let me lay hands on you as the congregation prays this prayer: “Spirit of the living God, present with us now, bless you in body, mind, and spirit; and heal you of all that harms you. Each time I lay my hands on someone's head we will say this prayer together. Come by yourself, or as a couple; but come and experience what it means to breathe hope, breathe yes, breathe resurrection. Come and know Shalom.