

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Michael J. Hoyt  
Fourth Presbyterian Church  
3rd Sunday in Easter  
April 15, 2018

## **Peace, Not Security**

Psalm 30; Luke 24:33-48

So this week on Monday,  
the church staff went to lunch together for Lauren Warren's birthday.  
On Tuesday,  
I had breakfast with the Tuesday morning study group down in the Crymes room.  
On Wednesday,  
we lined up at the food trucks for Wednesday Night Fellowship.  
On Thursday,  
we ate Zoe's take out at the Connect Series.  
On Friday,  
the Confirmands went to Frodo's on their way to the retreat.  
On Saturday,  
I ate breakfast and lunch with the Confirmands at the Spinks farm,  
while Jared Davis and others grilled hamburgers and hotdogs for Sterling,  
because, as Jared said,  
what do Presbyterians always do when we get together?

Perhaps we should feel right at home in the gospel story  
when one of the first things Jesus asks  
in his first resurrection appearance to the gathered disciples  
is, "What's for dinner?"

Jesus asks a lot of profound questions in the Gospels,  
like, "Which is easier, to say, your sins are forgiven, or stand up and walk?"  
or, "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but not the log in your own?"  
or, perhaps more profound, "Who do you say that I am?"  
So on this occasion, we might expect the most profound question of all.  
But Jesus asks,  
*Have you anything here to eat?*

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In fairness, it's not the only question Jesus asks.  
He begins with another question that's even more puzzling:  
*Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?*  
Well, is it not obvious?  
Their Lord has been arrested on trumped up charges,  
convicted on false testimony, and tortured to an agonizing death.  
The disciples are huddled together in hiding, behind locked doors,  
afraid the regime will be coming after them next.  
**Who wouldn't be frightened and full of doubts?**

In sorting out what these resurrection stories may mean for us,  
we can at least begin with the comforting truth  
that we are in good company with these disciples.

Have you come here this morning feeling that the world is a chaotic mess?  
Are you confused and disoriented by recent events in our world or in your life?  
Do you find yourself frustrated in the pursuit of your dreams?  
Are you suffering from heart-wrenching grief?  
Are you feeling guilty for things you have done, or things you have failed to do,  
or even, possibly, for an act of betrayal?  
Does the realities of our world, or of your life, scare you  
and make you want to hide?

If any of these descriptions fit where you've been living,  
then you have an easy place of connection with our story today,  
both in your bewilderment at the world  
and your startled surprise to discover that the risen Christ is here —  
right here, right now, in this room.

And perhaps his very first words to his disciples,  
*Peace be with you,*  
will begin to work within you, as well.

It may be that Jesus asks about dinner  
just to bring back a little normalcy to the moment?

When we're in the midst of a crisis, just doing the basics can be hard:  
first, remember to breathe.  
then, try to get some sleep, if possible.  
and eventually, you're going to have to eat something  
to give you the strength to keep going.

Eating together is shared preparation for the work of life that lies ahead.  
And it was in eating together, here and earlier on the road to Emmaus,  
that the disciples recognized their risen Lord.

Even in their terror,  
even as they wondered if they were seeing a ghost,  
they begin to realize this is the same Jesus they have known.  
For one thing,  
his words have the same effect they always had.  
He speaks, and their minds are opened  
to perceive what God is doing in the world,  
even in their world of rising chaos and threat.  
Jesus speaks in a way that begins to set them free from their fear,  
and to transform their despondent hearts  
into hearts that begin to hope again.

Jesus always was a master at meeting people right where they are,  
and so he does here with his disciples.  
The good news for them and for us is that  
to be encountered by the risen Lord  
does not require that we be able to work ourselves up  
into some exalted spiritual state.  
Jesus meet us where we are, as we are,  
being nothing more than who we are.  
He walks into our chaos and says, *Peace be with you.*

And then Jesus asks us — calls us —  
to move beyond where we are,  
and to become more than who we have been.<sup>1</sup>

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Dorothee Soelle was born in Germany in 1929,  
and grew up during the years of Hitler's rise to power  
and then under the reign of his autocratic regime.

After World War II  
her study of theology led her to reflect deeply  
on the horrors of the concentration camps,  
and how human civilization had managed to allow such atrocities to happen.  
She especially grappled with the realization  
that her own German Protestant tradition  
had failed to speak very loudly against Hitler  
and his blatantly immoral rise to power.

Soelle challenges the human propensity — seen here in the disciples —  
to seek safety above all else,  
the desire to feel secure from any threat,  
and to find that security in a God whose primary goal is to protect us.

Soelle challenges this expectation of security  
by teaching that when Jesus says, *Peace be with you*,  
he is offering something quite the opposite of security.

In her essay, entitled “Peace, Not Security”  
she notes that Christ-like transformation happens  
when we are willing to take a risk  
for the sake of the good news.

Knowing that Jesus has overcome the power of death, she writes,  
“you can put the neurotic need for security behind you.  
You do not need to defend your life like a lunatic...  
You can give your life away  
and spread it around.”<sup>2</sup>

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So how are you hiding right now?  
Behind what locked doors are you living your life?  
And how might the risen Lord be calling you to throw off your security  
and to risk truly living?

To move beyond security and into risk  
requires a deep trust  
that even in the most difficult circumstances,

God is at work in the world and in your life  
to accomplish God's purposes —  
that God is always at work  
to reconcile the world to God's self.  
This is the good news the resurrection of Jesus Christ  
brings to us and to our world.

But when we sing the Easter hymn  
“the strife is o’er, the battle done / the victory of life is won”  
we mean it in the ultimate sense of what Christ has accomplished;  
we do not mean that there will be no more strife, no more battle.  
Rather, even as we are called to enter into the risk and strife and battle for life,  
we do so with the assurance that our victory is assured in Christ.

So Jesus speaks words of challenge to his huddled disciples,  
*He opened their minds to understand the scriptures,  
and he said to them,  
‘Thus it is written,  
that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,  
and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name  
to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.  
You are witnesses of these things.*

**You see, Jesus has taken his risk, he has faced his challenge,  
not to remove all challenge from us,  
but to show us that God redeems those whose commitment to God's work  
leads them out of security and into suffering.**

So again...  
How are you hiding right now?  
Behind what locked doors are you living your life?  
And how might the risen Lord be calling you to throw off your security  
and to risk truly living?

We face momentous challenges in our world.  
The Christian gospel has never been more under threat, more in danger of being perverted.  
There is a self-serving idolatry running rampant in America  
that would tell us that our “neurotic need for security” comes first,  
and would have us defend and protect like lunatics  
what we wrongly think of as ours —  
ours to hoard, ours to consume, ours to defend.

It is a lunacy we cannot see for ourselves,  
until our eyes are opened to recognize our Lord  
who is standing in the midst of our American chaos  
saying *Peace be with you...*  
saying *You are my witnesses...*

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Any of you who are Harry Potter fans  
may remember the moment in the story when the evil Lord Voldemort  
returns to power  
and Harry sees a friend die at his side  
and barely escapes death himself.

Later, back inside the safety of the walls of Hogwarts school,  
the wise Professor Dumbledore says to him,  
“The time is coming, Harry,  
when good people will have to choose between what is easy  
and what is right.”

The message of this Easter season is a joyous message,  
but it is not an easy joy.

It is a joy that runs deep and endures beneath the chaotic surface of the world.  
It is an assurance that we can risk being witnesses of God’s reconciling work  
and trust that God will bring that work to final fulfillment.

The disciples had to make their choice  
between what was easy and what was right.  
And the same choice lies before us today.

What is God calling you to risk for the sake of what is right?

How is God calling you to die that you may begin truly to live?

Sisters and brothers, eat up!  
We will need strength for the journey ahead.

<sup>1</sup> Nancy R. Blakely, *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2008) 424

<sup>2</sup> Dorothee Soelle, *Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006) 80