

In the Midst of...Christ's Peace

April 19, 2020 Easter II

John 20: 19-31

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On twitter this week Kaitlin Curtice, author of Native, tweeted:

My 8yo was doing great working through his math lesson on rounding then he just started crying.. I asked why. ... Directions said to do the next assignment in pairs with a classmate.

In the news a woman whose father is in a care home in Toronto, paralyzed from a fall, describes her worry about him:

"It's really scary right now to think about what could possibly happen to them," "We really feel hopeless right now." "My dad is very vulnerable. One of the number one reasons why someone who is quadriplegic passes away is usually from pneumonia. I can't imagine losing my dad. It scares me to death."

Thursday a young woman was angry that she was charged a \$750 fine for visiting with a friend in the park and not maintaining social distance.

There are a lot of feelings of sadness, fear, despair, anger and many more as we move through this pandemic and the important physical distancing measures that have been instituted. As important as they are it doesn't make it easy.

The disciples had heard that Jesus was alive, Mary had seen him but they were locked in the upper room, filled with sadness, fear, despair, and even anger in the midst of hope as well. They were afraid of the Judean authorities who were responsible for Jesus' death, that they would be looking for them next to arrest. They may have even been afraid of Jesus – what would he say to them who scattered and fled and even denied him after he was arrested? They were filled with sadness that their hopes for a new life, a new way of being were dashed with his death, and anger at those responsible for his death. Then suddenly, Jesus is standing there with them, and the first thing he says to them is, Peace be with you. In that moment, in love and grace, the disciples feel the blessing of Christ's forgiving presence. They see his wounds and they rejoice. Their feelings are transformed and a new hope enters. Now the complex mix of feelings that they had probably would not have disappeared, but they would be able to face and experience them differently.

Then Thomas who was not with them, enters after Jesus is gone and is told about Jesus' appearing to them. His reaction may not be only of doubt, but also of regret that he missed out and he wants the same experience as the others had of seeing his wounds and touching Jesus to know that it was real. He has to wait for a week for this to happen. What would that week have been like for him? He continued with the disciples and tried to share their enthusiasm and excitement of sharing the story with others, but it would not have been the same. He might have felt some resentment, disappointment, even anger that he was left out of this experience. How do you feel when others are carrying on differently because of a common experience that you have not had but deeply wish you had? What support do you need to feel a part of something? I wonder what support the disciples gave to Thomas through what must have like a long week. They all would be still grieving as well as they lived into this new reality. What they knew was gone, what they were living into was new and different. As we move through this time of staying at home with all its' challenges, what support do you need? What support have you been receiving? What are you missing and grieving? What are you celebrating, if anything? Thomas lived his questions and tried to believe while he remained in community with the disciples and he must have drawn on them for support. Then Jesus appears to Thomas, in the same house as before, offering him the same peace. He believes with an exclamation of faith: "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus also breathed on the disciples for them to receive the Holy Spirit, to guide them and support them in their mission. While Jesus says to them "if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained." However, given what they experienced from Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit, they know that they are called to forgive. The first and greatest challenge of that forgiveness would be to forgive those who were responsible for killing Jesus, as Jesus did, from the cross, "Forgive them for they know not what they do". They have been commissioned and been given new hope, new life, a new beginning.

How do we draw on that hope, and new life? We are not all living and experiencing the same through this time. For some it is much more difficult than others. Some feel lonely while others may want more space or feel crowded in a full household. Some who don't go out much usually, may not feel very different. Others who have compromised health issues or feel vulnerable could be filled with fear and worry. How are you doing through this time? How do we cope?

How do we check in with one another, not just those we know outside of our household but those we are living with too? May we be gentle with one another, as well as honest with the challenges and feelings we are having. As we work to live out our faith during this time, may we hold on to that same hope that the disciples had and experience Christ's peace to sustain us. I invite you to reflect together on that peace and how this story speaks to our present time through this Pandemic.

Break out groups:

Share a time when you felt Christ's peace

How does this story speak to our present time through this pandemic?

Unshare screen, unmute all

In the whole group, see if there are any reflections people would like to share from their conversations.

As we live our questions, may we draw on the faith of the wider community, know that we are not alone, and that Christ's peace is with us.