

We have just heard the last of the resurrection stories for this Easter and even though the disciples have already experienced Jesus after his death, each time he appears to them they go through a whole mixture of emotions, fear, doubt, incredulity, joy. This time Jesus again reassures them, he shows them his wounds, he eats with them and explains the Scriptures to them. The Father has been true to his word by raising Jesus from the dead, and it will be up to the disciples to help others to believe in this central truth of the Christian faith by being his witnesses.

As with last Sunday's passage from John's gospel Jesus' first words to the disciples are words of peace. In the Gloria we have already echoed the words of the angels to the shepherds at Jesus' birth, "and on earth peace to people of good will." Until the pandemic put a stop to it we offered each other a sign of Christ's peace, just before receiving Communion. Walter Brueggemann, an outstanding American Protestant Old Testament scholar in his book called Peace maintains that peace is both a "gift and a task." When the disciples heard Jesus say, Peace be with you, he asks 'how did they understand the word, what did their hearts hear?' And perhaps more importantly what do we hear? The most common Hebrew word for peace is shalom which has the meaning of wellness, wholeness, healing, which God wants for those who are broken, hopeless or filled with fear. It has both a physical and spiritual dimension. If I want shalom for you it means I am willing to share what I have so that you can have what you need. Your well being is important to me. If we say we want peace in our world, then we are extending our willingness to share with many others. We only have to look around the world to see how many opportunities there are for us to bring peace by sharing hospitality, love, joy, indeed the presence of God amidst fear and suffering.

The peace Jesus came to give never relied on violence and domination, nor did it leave out the poor, the hungry, the oppressed. Jesus' peace is connected with justice, with the right ordering of relationships. If we accept Peace as both a gift and it means that we will not just talk about peace but will do what we can to work to end oppression and injustice. Our concern for peace encompasses the well being of both individuals and societies in pain, whatever that pain is. It means identifying with the marginalised, giving voice to the voiceless, working to reconcile those who regard themselves as enemies, refusing to be overwhelmed by the size of the task in hand. We might never know what effect a small act of kindness may have in transforming the life of another.

Jesus opening the minds and hearts of the disciples to the scriptures is a challenge to use our minds and hearts to appreciate what it means to be his followers today. One consequence is our determination not to ignore what is happening to our neighbour, to our creation, to those who have least in our world. Peace is both a gift and a task, the gift is from Jesus as we will hear after the Our Father, 'peace I leave you, my peace I give you'; the task is to make peace real for others, especially those most in need, by moving from words to actions.

## Bidding Prayers for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

Celebrant:

When I call, answer me O God of justice. With these words of today's psalm in our hearts and minds we turn to God in prayer.

Reader:

For the Church – that the Church will faithfully and courageously proclaim the gift of the peace of Jesus to the whole world and especially to those countries where there is so much violence.

Lord in your mercy

For the leaders of every nation – that they will discover ways of bringing peace with justice to their people and between peoples.

Lord in your mercy

For the people of those countries who are suffering great injustice, for example Myanmar, the Congo, China and many others – that they will experience the Lord's gift of real and lasting peace and that their suffering will come to an end.

Lord in your mercy

For those suffering in body, mind or spirit, especially those with incurable diseases and those with dementia – that they will receive the love, support and medical care that will help them to navigate a way through their illness.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the Covid-19 pandemic, and Joseph Booth, Agnes Knight, Frank Edmondson, Rose Ward, Winifred Ash, Farrell Brooks, Mary Newton, Diane Greenwood and Frank Hooson whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

All loving and peace giving God you never cease to gather us together to praise you. May we and all people experience the peace of your beloved Son, a peace that overcomes our fears and fills us with joy. Let the glory of Easter shine in our hearts and in our actions. Through Christ our Lord. Amen