

Sermon – Luke 24:36b-48; 1 John 3:1-7  
David R. Lyle  
Grace Lutheran Church  
3 Easter – Year B  
18 April 2021

“Something Fishy”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace this day in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

1. Trevor Lawrence made some people mad this week. Lawrence, for those of you who don't follow sports, is the national championship-winning college quarterback who is a lock to be the number one pick in this year's NFL draft. What did he do to make people upset? Get caught up in a scandal? No. He had the audacity to say that he doesn't have a chip on his shoulder and that he knows “there's more in life than playing football.” How dare he say such things! Fans, especially of the Jacksonville Jaguars who will likely draft him, were incensed. Where's his commitment? His dedication? Lawrence clarified matters on Twitter, pointing out that he loves the game of football and has a strong work ethic. He stuck to his main point, however, saying, “I don't need football to make me feel worthy as a person.” It sounds like this young man, a man of faith, has a sense of peace in his life, like he knows what truly matters. But when he spoke to this truth, America's sports fans held it against him. Something more important than football, than winning? Understanding that one's worth isn't measured by what happens during sixty minutes under the lights? Ridiculous. We talk about peace, both within and around us, but do we really want it, for ourselves or others? Or do we prefer the unrest that feeds the myth that we must strive, achieve, conquer to make meaning in life?

2. Luke brings us today once more to that first Easter. It is evening and the rumors have begun to spread. The women went to the tomb but found it empty. Peter ran to see for himself, but for the most part all this talk of resurrection seemed an idle tale. Two of Jesus' friends, Cleopas and another, began their long walk home to Emmaus, gripped by despair. But then, in the breaking of the bread, Christ is revealed. He vanishes. Cleopas and the other disciple rush back to Jerusalem to tell the others. While they take the road, Jesus reappears suddenly in the midst of his friends, which is where the story picks up today. The first words out of his mouth? "Peace be with you." The risen Christ comes to bring peace. Is peace a gift we're ready to receive, or will we continue to push back against it?
  
3. If you missed the news about a college quarterback's comments this week, I don't blame you in the least. The news cycle was filled with affronts to the peace which God intends. The week brought us deeper into the Derek Chauvin trial only to be interrupted with the killing of Daunte Wright. As we tried to internalize that horror, we watched (or chose not to watch) the bodycam footage of Adam Toledo, all of thirteen years old, being gunned down in an alley; we woke the next day to learn of a massacre at a FedEx facility in Indianapolis in which a shooter killed eight people before taking his own life. As I was brushing my teeth this morning, Erika, scrolling through the news, told me of a shooting overnight in Kenosha. These events are by no means identical, but they all witness to this world's disdain for peace; to the brokenness that leads us to value violence; to the power that death still wields. I confess that the only peace I felt at moments this week was not a true peace, but the simple absence of feeling that comes from becoming numb to such events. Another day, another tragedy inflicted upon humans by humans. So much violence. Do we even want peace? But we cannot remain numb, not in the face of wanton, senseless death.

4. Jesus, risen from the grave, steps into this news cycle just as he stepped into that upper room two thousand years ago. Jesus enters in; Jesus speaks peace. Jesus bestows the peace that can never be attained through striving for our own success or by holding others down. It is not a peace that can be won or secured; it can only be received as a gift from the One who lives on the other side of death. Jesus enters, showing us his wounded flesh. He is no ghost. Something fishy is afoot (afin?) for everyone knows that the dead stay dead. Yet here he stands. To prove the point and because a few days in the grave will make one hungry, Jesus asks for food. They give him fish and he eats it. A ghost couldn't do that! Jesus wants his friends to know that he is truly raised from the dead; the point is not simply that there is life after death, but that life has triumphed over death. Death is undone. Jesus, who spoke peace and forgiveness throughout his ministry, was hung upon a crosspiece and left for dead. He cried out, forsaken not only by earthly friends but by heavenly Father, too, it seemed. Jesus endured the worst violence this world had to offer. Upon his return, does he speak violence, seek vengeance? No. He speaks peace. The peace that comes when death itself is undone and we are invited into the life that is truly life, that undoes our cycles of suffering.
5. Dorothee Sölle was born in Germany in 1929 and grew up during Hitler's Nazi regime. In her vocation as theologian, she grappled with the legacy of a Protestant liberalism that failed to stop that war; a church that, indeed, in many ways supported Hitler's program, including the concentration camps, in order to keep its own place in the world. Nancy Blakely writes that Sölle challenged "the human propensity for wanting to feel safe, to feel secure from any threat, by seeking that [security] from God." Sölle writes in her essay, "Jesus' Death," that "because you are strong [in Christ], you can put the neurotic need for security behind you. You do not need to defend your life like a lunatic. For the love of the poor, Jesus says, you can give your life away and spread it around." Sölle reminds us that when we seek to create peace

through achievement or security, we perpetuate cycles of alienation and systemic violence. Only in trusting God to give us peace will we find it.

6. "Peace be with you," Jesus says. The peace that Jesus speaks, enacts, pours out, calls out both the lie that we must always be striving for individual meaning and worth *and* the lie that we must support systems of oppression that seek to establish our security. Security is at best the avoidance of harm; at worst, it is the securing of one's own interests through the oppression of others. Either way, it ain't peace. Peace is not the absence of suffering; it is the presence of the God we can trust even in the midst of our suffering, for we know in faith that we already live with Jesus on the other side of the grave. This is the peace that God insists on giving us for the sake of Jesus, a peace that invites us to trust the future to God. We do not know the future, what harm or hurt may befall us or those we love. But we do know that in the future, as John writes, we will be revealed to be like Christ for the sake of Christ. We will see Christ as he is. Trusting an unknown future to a faithful God, we rest in the promise that we are known now. Again, John: "We are God's children now." *Now*. Now has Christ died for us. Now does Jesus call us to repentance, now does Jesus forgive us. Now are we called to proclaim his name as witnesses of these things. We do so by affirming the promise of the resurrection, which is that if life is important in the Kingdom that is to come, life is also important in this world. Now. Today. In our sin and ignorance, we chose death over life, violence over peace. Today, Christ shows himself to us and we are ignorant no more. A deeper yearning grows within us. We yearn for life, for peace. Jesus stands here today, meeting that yearning with more than we need.
  
7. Christ is risen. God would not let Jesus stay dead and in him, the first fruits of the resurrection, we discover that this peaceful promise is for us, too. Just so are we sent to witness to Christ, the bringer of peace and life. Jesus' resurrection compels us to care for the bodily, physical needs of others,

whatever the physical bodies look like. You, friends, are witnesses of these things. Whatever you bring with you into worship today; whatever fear or anxiety, whatever insecurity or emptiness, whatever sin or shame, hear this from the mouth of our risen Lord, the very Word of God: Peace be with you. You, friends, live beyond the reach of death. Go, and witness to the power of life that flows from the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep you hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.