

Peace Be With You
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Texts: John 14:19, 22-29, Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

For the last four weeks, the kids have been studying the stories of Jesus's appearances to the disciples after the resurrection in Sunday School. We've been exploring them through the senses, wondering about the ways that Jesus made himself known to them. Mary didn't recognize him until she heard him call her name. Thomas didn't believe until he touched his hands and feet. Two disciples chatted with him for several miles on the way to Emmaus and didn't recognize their teacher until he broke bread and fed them. And Peter had to see the empty tomb to be convinced.

The point, though, is not how dense the disciples were, but how Jesus is very much alive, not in heaven far, far away, but right here in the midst of us. Each week, the children were asked to wonder where they have seen Jesus alive through the actions of others who live as Christ in the world. I wonder what you would say?

I moved to a new school when I was in seventh grade, and my shy, nerdy personality made me a target. I remember the day Jesus sat with me. I was trying to avoid the group of mean girls who liked to follow me around. I had my nose in a book as I sat at the lunch table alone. Three girls I didn't really know walked up and said, "Let us sit with you. They won't tease us if we sit together." They sure looked like three misfit middle school girls, but it sounded like Jesus calling my name.

I walked into the hospital room and, as soon as I walked in, he grabbed my hand and held it. He didn't say much. I talked to the family gathered in the room, and we shared time with the man who had touched each of our lives. But I sensed what I couldn't see... Jesus was holding my hand and his. It was a thin place, a resurrection promise, a light in a darkness of grief.

It was just a sip of water. I was in the chapel at seminary, struggling with the weight of all I was doing, when allergies got the best of me and I stifled my cough. But she heard, or maybe saw, and silently handed her water bottle to me. To her, it was a sip of water. To me, it was presence and compassion. Jesus was there in her gift of water.

"Those who love me will keep my word... and we will come to them and make our home in them." Jesus's dwelling place, his Father's house with its many rooms, is as close as our neighbors. If we take the time to notice, we will see it in those who do their best to live with the compassion and grace of Jesus right here and now.

One of the miracles of the resurrection is that Jesus does not leave us for long. Only three days and he's back walking around with us in ways that are hard for us to see and believe, but no less real. Thank goodness for an advocate, the Holy Spirit, that helps us see, hear,

touch, taste, and believe.

*Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.¹*

It is the Spirit that walks alongside us to remind us, to open our eyes to see that Jesus is very much alive and with us. And it is the Spirit that prepares us to be a dwelling place for Jesus, so that others might recognize him too.

As a parent, I find myself begging for moments of peace and quiet. Just a few minutes of not having to solve all the problems and adjudicate all the conflicts. Just go to your room and ignore each other and let me be at peace. But if I learned anything in my seventeen years in early childhood classrooms, it's that squashing conflict does not bring lasting peace. A teacher can scare a classroom of students into behaving, but the problems of community living fester right below the surface.

This is the peace of the Pax Romana, likely what Jesus was referring to when he spoke of the peace the world gives. The Roman government had succeeded in creating a time of relative tranquility, an absence of war. But only because opponents had lost their ability to resist. The government made it clear it was best for them to enjoy the infrastructure, the sciences, the arts, and not to rock the boat.

The peace that Jesus speaks of is bigger than that. It is less the absence of something as it is the presence of well-being and harmony. It is a completeness in our being, a peace within that gives us the courage to be the peace in whatever place we find ourselves. And it's a peace that extends past ourselves and includes the whole community. Peace is what happens when we approach each other with love and seek not uniformity, but unity with one another.

Jesus's peace does not silence those who are "not like us", but gives us the courage to speak, listen, learn, and dream with each other to create solutions. Fear is faster, but love lasts.

Rabbi David Zaslow remarks that peace, shalom, "refuses to create an "other" out of the people with whom [we] may disagree on a particular issue. To the contrary... it requires dialogue: tough dialogue, heart-wrenching dialogue, gentle dialogue, but always dialogue – speech that goes back and forth – with each side constantly challenging, refining, and purifying the "other" until we recognize that the "other" is none "other" than a reflection

¹ Daniel Iverson, "Spirit of the Living God," In *Glory to God*, edited by David Eicher, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013): 288.

of our own selves.”²

This is the peace that Jesus exemplified. If someone was “othered” by society, Jesus was there with them. In kindness, he sought their common humanity. He didn’t subdue them by force, and he didn’t do it to convince them, but he just loved them. This is the peace that leads to wholeness in community, a true shalom.

Making room for the Spirit to dwell, for God’s breath to inspire us, we make room in our lives to breathe out the work of peace in our living. Here is the opposite of what we were talking about earlier – instead of us looking for where Jesus is alive and among us, we act in ways that show others that Jesus is indeed alive.

*He came down that we may have peace. He came down that we may have peace.
He came down that we may have peace. Hallelujah forevermore.*³

I have a superpower. I am a super worrier. Which is, I suppose, not the best power one could have. But here we are. And as a super worrier with a lot of experience, one thing I can tell you for certain is that nobody in the history of worrying has ever been calmed by someone just proclaiming, “don’t let your hearts be troubled, do not be afraid.” Right. Sure.

Our feelings of sadness, anxiety, fear, anger, disappointment... they come uninvited. And Jesus, who was human, knew that. I wonder if what he was getting at was not that we shouldn’t feel them, because we can’t help that, but we shouldn’t be overcome by them.

These disciples are staring at a very uncertain future... they were preparing to mourn the death of their beloved teacher, the balance of power in society was startlingly uneven, and what lay in store for them was unclear. Perhaps we can understand this too. Different millennium. Same human situation.

How can we not be troubled by the deaths of ones we love, by the horror of wars where innocent people are collateral damage, by a reality where simply speaking your opinion can get you locked away, by a nation where food rots in warehouses while millions starve on the streets?

I don’t think Jesus is telling us not to feel, but not to let it make us freeze or look away. Instead, we are to face it with courage and faith. And in doing so, we find that Jesus is not far away at all.

² David Zaslow, “The Deeper Meaning of Shalom,” Rabbi Zaslow, <https://rabbidavidzaslow.com/the-deeper-meaning-of-shalom/>, accessed 5/22/2025.

³ John Bell, “He Came Down,” In *Glory to God*, edited by David Eicher, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013): 137.

So, have eyes of wonder... but not just eyes, but with ears and hearts... to seek Jesus alive in the world. Sometimes, when we are troubled and afraid, we forget to look. We miss the neighbor who calls our name. We ignore the stranger on the road. We hurry past the one who reaches for our hand.

But if we are truly believers of the resurrection, we believe that Christ is alive and dwelling among us. It's easy for us to say that Jesus is up in heaven, light years away. But this isn't what he tells us. He tells us he dwells within those who keep his word. The kingdom of heaven is not far away, but right here in this place.

Open your hearts to the inspiration of the spirit. Sometimes the troubles and grief of the world are so big that we begin to feel all alone, to lose hope, and to wonder where God is in the midst of the darkness. We build barriers to protect ourselves. We gather up more than we need. We turn inward.

But if we are truly believers of the resurrection, we believe that Christ is alive and dwelling within us. And we trust that if we keep his word, if we keep doing the Jesus things – healing, welcoming, teaching, feeding, comforting, advocating – we are not alone. Jesus sends the Spirit to help us. It's in the doing that we experience the breath of the Spirit helping us do the things we didn't know we could do. And it's in the moments of connection that we feel the peace of Christ flow through us. If you're ever wondering where God is, start by loving like Jesus and invite the Spirit in.

So friends, go with eyes of wonder and seek the risen Christ. Go open your hearts and let the Spirit inspire you. And may the peace of Christ be with you wherever you go. Amen.