

## POINTS TO PONDER

"Peace is not merely the absence of war and violence, hatred and animosity, greed and felt superiority, competitiveness and domination, inequality and injustice, fear and the desire for control, and the myriad of vices that have us to care for ourselves more than we care for others. Peace cannot exist if any of these are present, but peace requires cultivation of virtues and not simply the absence of vices.

Peace is the positive presence of equity in justice, intentionality in kindness, delight in empathetic joy, gentleness in correction, authenticity in generosity, compassion in collegiality, tenderness in encouragement, resolve in loving unconditionally, and the exuberant sharing with others from the beauty of our being. Peace may start from within oneself, but it not manifested till we dedicate ourselves to caring for others as much as we care for ourselves.

Peace is thus the resurrected life Jesus offered to his disciples, again and again; values that, if they followed, would help them to be the peacemakers of this world."

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 4/12/2023*

"When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week,  
and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews,  
Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'"

— *John 20.19*

"John's identification of Jesus' resurrection on the 'first day of the week' hearkens back to the beginning of his gospel where the logos was one with God on the first day of creation. The point is that once again a new world is being created – this time with the explicit purpose of carrying out the values and virtues of God that were vindicated in Jesus given his resurrection. Now we may all be assured that we, too, can go forth and live in accordance with Christ's way. Resurrection was not just for Jesus, but for us all – else it loses its efficacy. It is to be a social and world-wide transformation, not a one-time event for a particular individual.

Consequently, the disciples, which implies us all, are to no longer fear what other human beings may do to us, but simply carry out Christ's mission and purpose of creating a loving, just, and peaceful world based in egalitarian values as Jesus himself emulated. No longer do we need to lock ourselves behind doors and walls, fearful of what others may do to us. Instead, we are to grasp onto that peace that is already possible within us given that we share the same logos or Spirit that was in Jesus."

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 4/7/2021*

"When I dare to be powerful – to use my strength in the service of my vision,  
then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."

— *Audre Lorde*

"After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.  
Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the teacher.  
Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As God has sent me, so I send you.'"

— *John 20.20-21*

"How can one know peace? Especially one who has been tortured and killed, and who still retains the wounds of the world?"

Jesus' resurrection answers that question in John's gospel. Jesus appears to his disciples, the ones who just a couple days earlier denied and betrayed him, who themselves inflicted some emotional wounds on Jesus in abandoning him in his hour of need, and he puts all of that felt suffering aside and offers them peace. He doesn't condemn, ridicule, or even judge their behavior towards him – which itself seems rather other-worldly.

Why is this? Because Jesus is one with logos within him; he is one with God. He cannot help but be who he is: a person characterized by love, justice, and peace. Animosity cannot be maintained when these are our cardinal values. They are the manifestations of one imbued with logos.

God knows the power of peace that is not rooted in the actions that others do to one, and not based on the circumstances of one's life. Rather God's peace is rooted in what is intrinsic to all of us: logos; truth, reason, word, principle, etc.

It is this inner quality, this Spirit, that liberates us from all the contingencies of earthly life. It is a peace that perseveres in the midst of persecution, despite the cruelty of torture, and in spite of death itself. It is that eternal peace that has always existed, from the beginnings of the world, and throughout all time – and even beyond time. It is a peace that is formed when our values and virtues coincide with God's; when we make God's aims and goals our own, here in this life.

Jesus offers them a peace they can take with them to live the rest of their earthly lives. As he knew it himself, so will they. Jesus sends them to carry out what he began. And this is how peace is prospered; that having received it ourselves, we pass it on to others rather than trying to possessively keep it for ourselves by hiding it from others.

Jesus came to his disciples when they had locked themselves away from the rest of humanity. They were wallowing in sorrow and in fear. But Jesus shows them the way of resurrected life – how to live in love, justice, and peace without being ruled by our fears. Jesus sends us all on this path. Are we ready to follow? Are we willing to receive the peace that requires our own transformation of Spirit and character?"

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 4/7/2021*

"A life of total dedication to the truth also means a life of willingness to be personally challenged."

— *M. Scott Peck, 20th century*

"When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'"

— *John 20.22-23*

"Jesus sends us to a world in need of the logos within us. But he does not send us as we have come to be on our own accord, following our own values. No, he sends us into the world with the Holy Spirit with us and in us.

He empowers us to do what it was thought at that time that only God could do: forgive others of their sins – whether against us, or against others. In endowing us with this Holy Spirit of logos and forgiveness, we no longer consider ourselves as incapable of forgiving those who have done us wrong or even betrayed us. Jesus' resurrection testimony bears witness to this reality. He doesn't berate them for when they left him alone in the hands of his enemies, nor did he insist on their apologies for their betrayal.

Jesus once again models resurrected life, just as he had always done, by loving others even when they seemed unlovable, by desiring wellness for them and the benefits of justice even when they had been unjust, and by seeking to create peace and reconciliation with them even when they had broken the covenant of mutual care and compassion that he had taught them.

No matter what may have been Jesus' form in resurrection, physical or spiritual, or even if it was a collective vision they all experienced, the most important reality of resurrection life was that nothing can separate us from the love, justice, and peace of God when we finally decide to accept that Spirit into our lives; i.e., when we affirm the logos within us, cultivate it, and implement it in our lives through our thoughts, feelings, words, and deeds.

When we forgive, we reveal that Spirit lives in us. We reveal that we have adopted the breath of God that was originally blown upon all creation, and that now is once again blown on a world in need of new beginnings. Is this the breath of God we want blown on us?"

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 4/7/2021

"Doubt is a pain too lonely to know that faith is his twin brother."

— Khalil Gibran

"But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the teacher.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'"

— John 20.24-25

"Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is one element of faith."

— Paul Tillich, 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian

"John's gospel is the only one to give this account of Thomas. Written decades after the synoptics, John was well aware that one of the biggest hindrances to gaining new converts to the gospel message was that it was unbelievable to the common person. People are not brought back to life after having been brutally slain. And this is no doubt why his gospel also speaks in a highly mytho-poetic language that is far more metaphorical than even that of the synoptics. He doesn't want them to miss the meaning of his words by them thinking that he is being literal rather than figurative.

Thomas represents all those people who can't get their heads around a raised Jesus who was crucified by the Roman empire. Their skepticism was warranted based on their acknowledgement of how people who are murdered by the empire don't come back to life. John uses Thomas as a figure that these reasonable skeptics can relate to and perhaps convince them to see a reality that is beyond explanation.

The set-up is striking, as one of Jesus' own disciples refuses to believe in such conjectures that have no empirical proof. Who can't resonate with his claim that he will not believe unless he is able to test the reality that is being claimed for himself? Honestly, when people tell you something that one's mind cannot possibly grasp given how we all know reality is constructed, isn't it the logical thing to demand evidence to such preposterous claims?"

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 4/7/2021

"In like manner, if I let myself believe anything on insufficient evidence, there may be no great harm done by the mere belief; it may be true after all, or I may never have occasion to exhibit it in outward acts. But I cannot help doing this great wrong towards Man, that I make myself credulous. The danger to society is not merely that it should believe wrong things, though that is great enough; but that it should become credulous, and lose the habit of testing things and inquiring into them; for then it must sink back into savagery."

— William Kingdon Clifford, *The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays*

"A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but trust.' Thomas answered him, 'My teacher and my God!'"

— John 20.26-28

"In those who rest on their unshakable faith, pharisaism and fanaticism are the unmistakable symptoms of doubt which has been repressed. Doubt is not overcome by repression but by courage. Courage does not deny that there is doubt, but it takes the doubt into itself as an expression of its own finitude and affirms

the content of an ultimate concern. Courage does not need the safety of an unquestionable conviction. It includes the risk without which no creative life is possible."

— *Paul Tillich, 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian*

"Resurrection living is contagious. When we are around those who live resurrected life, we are inspired by their trust in that which they can't explain to us in a logical way. A week has passed, and who can't imagine that all the disciples except Thomas are buzzing with excitement given their prior experience of the risen Christ? Thomas may still not believe, but he cannot deny how their own lives may have been transformed from their collective experience. This week of living with them in their own transformed state, after Jesus had breathed the Spirit into them, had to be mesmerizing for Thomas.

Jesus comes again, and the doors are shut but no longer locked. In other words, the other disciples are no longer fearful of what others may do to them. Jesus appears again in this apparently immaterial, yet observable, way, and once again offers them peace for them to accept into their lives. He then turns to Thomas and repeats Thomas' own words as to what would be necessary for him to trust, as did the other disciples. He invites Thomas, unlike he had a week earlier not done with Mary Magdalene, to touch him...to put his hand in his side, where there still was a gaping wound.

John does not need to tell whether or not Thomas actually put his hand there or not, for Thomas exclaims that Jesus is his teacher and his God. Mystical utterances are common to John's gospel. For Thomas, the logos in Jesus has been transmogrified. He now has experienced, even without touching, what the other disciples have come to see as true: that neither ridicule, torture, death, nor any other human power, can bind one to mere existence when we come to see the power of our lived values resurrected in the lives of our loved ones and ourselves. Resurrected life is not merely the state of being alive, but is to transformed into life abundant.

Thomas sees that our true connection to God is not being able to see or touch God, as if God had a physical form, but rather that we are all witnesses to the logos of God that lives in each one of us. In exclaiming that the resurrected Christ is his God, he is avowing that he has himself accepted Christ's own virtues and values into his life, and that they are more important to him than any evidentiary documentation of any physical reality. He now sees the connection of God to Jesus, and us to God and Jesus, in that we all are given that same divine image of logos that is our birthright.

We are created good. That is what God declared at the beginning. And despite the barbarisms of empires, that goodness remains. It may die for a while and even be entombed, but from that seemingly insignificant and inconsequential seed can arise from the earth a sprout that blooms and flowers into something beautiful and exceedingly good. Resurrection life multiplies itself – just as Jesus had created a situation where 5000 were fed with 5 barley loaves and two fish...just as a seed grows into a plant and creates hundreds of additional seeds. Resurrection life is prolific. It cannot be contained."

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 4/7/2021*

"Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me?  
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to trust.'"

— *John 20.29*

"The proof that God raised Jesus from the dead is not the empty tomb,  
but the full hearts of his transformed disciples.

The crowning evidence that he lives is not a vacant grave,  
but a spirit-filled fellowship.

Not a rolled-away stone, but a carried-away church."

— *Clarence Jordan, 20th century*

"Thomas may only have come to this realization because he envisioned the resurrected Christ himself, but the point John drives home is that we are just as blessed, if not moreso, when we come to this realization through our mind's eye or soul's intuition rather than our physical senses.

This was exactly what the Gentiles needed in story form to help them see the palatability of the truth of Jesus and the power of resurrection living without necessarily latching on to the theory of Jesus' bodily resurrection and the wonderment of what that meant for them if resurrection life were not possible for them as well.

We are most blessed when we trust in God's values above our own perceptions of the world and how it seems to be directed. What is, or the way it has always been, as empires like to point out to promote their own causes, is not what gives life meaning and purpose. Those things have never given us true peace. Nor have they helped us to forgive and love one another. That requires an ethic and a spirituality that is a cosmic force beyond what the earthly world reveals to our senses. It necessitates that we get in touch with the logos within us.

What is most important to us in the story of resurrection? Does John's account help us to see things differently than we have previously? If so, how does this new seeing change the way we envision ourselves responding to life differently? Will our lives change with this new understanding? Will we find peace? Will we come to forgive more easily, and to love unconditionally?"

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 4/7/2021*