

Grace and peace to you from God our Father from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever had those periods in life those moments where you simply needed someone to come to your side, someone to break into the midst of whatever it is you were experiencing and bring words of comfort, hope and peace to steady the storm. We have all had those moments. We are in one of those moments.

A couple come to my mind. Many years ago I was in the midst of a deep, dark depression. It took every ounce of energy I had just to get out of bed and go to work. I look back now I am so grateful for my wife, the love, support and presence of Christ she was, and also grateful for a couple of friends who took time listen and ensured me I was not alone. They, too, were the presence of Christ bringing peace into that turbulent moment of my life.

Or, following my brother's sudden death a few years ago. I'm amazed at the cards I received from many of you or the words of compassion shared and also so grateful for those handful of you from Bethany that made the two hour trip to either attend the funeral service or simply spend 10 or 15 minutes with our family at the visitation and wrap us in arms of love. You also were the presence of Christ bringing peace into that difficult time. Because that is what we believe. We are the presence of Christ to one another bringing words of comfort, strength, joy and peace in the midst of whatever it is that we are going through. No matter the momentary affliction it is that we are experiencing we are not alone. Our future and our trust is in God's hands.

There's been times where I struggled to comprehend that I could bear that presence of Christ to another. That Jesus might be working in me. That his spirit in me and uses me to bring that piece to others because I'm not perfect I've got my limitations I've got my weaknesses and plenty of faults ask my wife early on in my pastoral career as I discerning still how was using me. I'm working at the hospital doing summer residency of chaplaincy I'm in the intensive care unit and I'm standing outside the room in which I see three women three women probably in there in their 50s maybe early 60s in there huddled around the bed there is a lifeless body hooked to all sorts of monitors and wires and tubes. And I can see they've been crying. Their wounds clearly are real. I'm standing outside pondering shall I enter and what will I say when suddenly women look up at me in unison they see my badge that says Chaplain and they say praise the Lord you answer to our prayers. I think, "what in the world" and turn and see behind me the Catholic priest who also makes rounds in the hospital. He's dressed in his shirt that I'm dressed in this morning but at the time I was not wearing a clergy shirt but a regular normal old shirt. Now he's tall in stature with gray hair and in wise and in his years of pastoral care. And I think surely they're looking at him; but then they invite me into the space which I have been hesitant to enter and let me know that they had just made the decision to remove their mother from life support and my presence was the very presence of Jesus Christ entering into that deep time of grief bringing them some peace amid the stormy seas that they had been traveling for weeks. God works in me and God works in each of you to give witness to the peace of the risen Christ to the world despite our limitations and our flaws, despite our weaknesses.

Christ's peace came to the disciples that first day of the week. The text tells us they are in fear and why would they not be? After what they've just seen and experienced. They've heard the news from Mary earlier in the day that Jesus has risen and one can only imagine they too were fearful they might succumb to the same fate Jesus did for their association with him. Or perhaps they are fearful of how they are to move forward after following Jesus for three years. He's been their whole life and has provided for them. He's taught them. He's comforted them and now what? I imagine their hope was lost, their dreams had faded. Disappointment and doubt, unbelief, isolation and abandonment they were experiencing along with a host of other emotions in the span of just a few days from when they had gathered in another room with Jesus to share a dinner. To watch as he washed their feet so lovingly. To hear that he was going to go ahead of them to be with his Father. Going to prepare a room for them and he would take them to it when he returned. He assured them he would not leave them abandoned. He would give them the Holy Spirit. This precious gift that would be with them forever that would remind them of all the words he said. And then he spoke words of peace.

Now, into the midst of this locked room Jesus enters. If a tomb could not hold his dead body certainly a locked room is no match for Jesus. He enters and states, "Peace be with." I imagine the flood of memories of their time with Jesus suddenly surfaced as they recognized his voice. It is true, he is risen from the dead. Just as he said, he will not leave them abandoned but will come to them and he will breathe on them the gift of his Holy Spirit that will be his abiding presence with them. Twice he states, "Peace be with you" and then a third time as they are gathered with Thomas since he was not present initially. These words of peace are comforting words able to transform fear into joy, doubt into belief.

Jesus does something else. He shows them his wounds, which say something about who he is and who God is. Jesus does all this as they are huddled in their homes in fear. Dealing with their own wounds of grief. Just as we too our huddled in our houses. We too are wounded in so many ways. Because we can't come into this space, shake hands and speaks words of peace to one another. We can't wrap our arms around a brother or sister who's hurting in this time. Wounded because of the Governor's announcement Friday that our schools will be closed through the end of the year. The grief that our students are experiencing is very real. The grief our teachers and staff are experiencing is very real. So many hopes that have been dashed leaving disappointments and uncertainties about the future. Jesus knows these wounds are real because Jesus has those wounds on his hands, feet and in his side. He takes our wounds upon himself. He experiences the same afflictions we experience. Yet, these wounds will not have the final word. God will transform these wounds into life. Jesus will reveal his presence to us even while we huddle in closed rooms and behind locked doors. He comes into the midst of those sacred spaces and issues us the same words, "Peace be with you" transforming our fear into jubilation. Our doubts into joy. May the peace of Christ be with you and may you proclaim those words of peace to all. Pick up the phone, send an email, drop a card in the mail, utter them to another as you pass by six-foot apart. Trust that the Holy Spirit is in you. Peace be with you. Amen.