

Easter 1 (2025)

My mother was a reader. She liked novels.

I remember her saying that sequels were for the most part disappointing

I suppose that is true in *most* cases. However, not all. This morning's Gospel stands as exception.

Mary Magdalene, you will remember, came very early to the tomb while it was dark expecting to find a corpse. Instead, she found the stone rolled away. Her take on what she saw was that someone had stolen the Lord's body.

In a state of panic and confusion, she ran and roused Peter and John and summoned them to the tomb.

When they arrive, they found it as she had said – open and empty.

The puzzling thing was that the grave clothes were still wound as they had been when a body had been present within them.

More than that, the napkin that had been around the face, had been folded and carefully placed to the side.

What did it all mean?

Before leaving the tomb John seems to have had a burst of embryonic understanding.

Remembering Jesus' words about rising from dead which He had spoken as they made their way towards Jerusalem . . . *could this be what had happened?*

The two then went home. If the Gospel of John were a novel and ended here, it would have ended with a giant question mark,

Thankfully, it does not. Thankfully, we have a sequel. In this case, the sequel is better.

We discover that John's hunch was right. Jesus was alive and on the move!

In the verses just preceding where we picked up reading, He appeared to Mary Magdalene. Apparently, she had stayed behind in the garden after Peter and John had gone home.

Then, in today's Gospel, on the evening of the same day, Jesus appeared to all of the disciples minus Judas, who had gone off and hanged himself, and Thomas, who was absent for some unexplained reason.

Locks on the door could not keep the risen Jesus out.

More alive than ever, He appears and greets them with a shout of 'Shalom' or 'Peace'!

We might want to pause here and consider the meaning of this greeting. It was a common and customary one among the Jews of Jesus' day. But I think we would be wrong in hearing it only as a greeting.

Think back at what the disciples did following their Master's arrest in the garden. ///

Except for John and Peter, they fled. They acted as cowards.

Peter did not flee but did something worse. He denied even knowing his Lord, not once but three times.

Following this lacklustre performance, one could well imagine the disciples feeling some discomfort meeting up with the One they had pledged to follow all the way to death . . . the One they had let down.

But they had nothing to fear. Jesus' victory over sin and death outshone whatever they had or had not done.

Rather than scolding them, He comes with word of comfort, encouragement and victory. All three are contained in this greeting of peace.

Their response? /// JOY! There is lesson here for us.

When we stray, when we prove faithless, when we let Him down, we can have confidence that He will not abandon us or put us on a shelf.

“His property is always to have mercy.”

“He is more ready to forgive than we to ask.”

“He desires not the death of a sinner,” the Book of Common Prayer, echoing Scripture, reminds us.

Good news for us ‘miserable offenders’ (‘miserable’ here referring NOT to how we feel but to our helpless state).

No, He bears with our weaknesses and comes with a word of peace.

A few years ago, I was outside in the church yard when a man, who had come to get his taxes done (the AARP Foundation was providing this service as they did this year downstairs in Thomason Hall) walked over to where I was and began a conversation.

After some general remarks about my newspaper columns and gardening, the conversation shifted to spiritual things.

He said he once had great joy in his walk with God, but a foolish thing he had done, a serious misstep, had caused that joy to go away, even though he had confessed that sin.

Right then and there, I prayed with him, asking that the joy of his salvation might be restored.

I further reminded him that it is Satan, not Christ, who dredges up the mistakes of the past and keeps bringing them before us. That is why the Bible calls him the ‘accuser of the brethren’.

It didn’t occur to me at the time to mention Jesus’ word of peace to the wayward disciples in today’s Gospel, but it would have been appropriate.

Jesus still brings peace and out from this peace, joy.

What about you? Has a wall come up between you and your God?

If so, don’t leave it there. Let Jesus take that barrier down.

If you have confessed the failures of the past, let them go. The old account has been settled. There is nothing more to be done. Hear and receive His message of peace and go forward. Go and sin no more.

But we find something else going on in today's Gospel as well. Jesus does not just proclaim peace: He commissions the disciples as agents of peace.

He sends them out as witnesses.

Notice what He says in verse 21: **“As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”**

He transfers to them the power and authority He has been given by His Father: **“Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”**

The Apostles are to go and proclaim repentance, restoration, forgiveness, peace in His name. That remains the calling of those in the ordained ministry today, indeed of all the baptised.

Consider the lowly dandelion. It points in the direction of how this witnessing business works. You've seen them, I'm sure.

As a child, you probably blew on one and watched in amazement as the spores went into the air and spread out.

Well, that's a good picture of our calling as baptised believers. We are to breathe out God's peace into the world.

What if this began happening in your life and my life?

Well, for one thing the pews of this church would be full every Sunday, life in this

community would be richer, blessings would multiply, many more would come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and above all we would know that peace that passes all understanding in our own lives, and out from that peace would come joy, heavenly joy.

Why not give it a chance? Take a deep breath. Blow on your dandelion!

Allow me to close with some words I know you have heard. They are attributed to St. Francis:

Lord make Me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine master grant that I may

Not so much seek to be consoled as to console
To be understood, as to understand.
To be loved, as to love.

For it's in giving that we receive
And it's in pardoning that we are pardoned
And it's in dying that we are born...
To eternal life. ///

May we give an hearty 'Amen' to every line
of this prayer.

Peace, joy, witness are what follow *after* the
tomb is found empty; they are the sequel. May
these three be found in your life and in my life.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!