

Jesus came and stood among them and said 'Peace be with you'.

In the name etc.

What is your idea of a peaceful afternoon? Perhaps a doze in the sun, a cup of tea, a beer garden. Perhaps you're on your own, perhaps you're with close family. Each of us will have our own idea of what peace is, no doubt, but there will be areas of overlap. Certainly there will be things, times, places which we would undoubtedly agree are not 'peaceful' at all.

What doesn't sound like a peaceful, post Easter break, I am sure, is the idea of a recently departed friend, whose traumatic death you are still mourning, arriving in the very midst of you, when you are in a locked room with no way in or out due to the fear you, quite reasonably have, that the cycle of violence which took him from you might extend to you and your surviving friends. It doesn't sound peaceful at all: it would be like seeing a ghost. But worse.

This is exactly what happens to the disciples in the aftermath of Easter. Having hidden for fear of the repercussions of the execution of Jesus and convinced, utterly convinced, that he was dead, Jesus suddenly appears in their midst. But Jesus is not there as a ghost. He is there as the risen Christ. One who has died but has returned again. Not to haunt, not to remind his friends of their own death, but to bring life. And life that is beyond any other, life that is in its absolute fullness, life that is everlasting.

And what is it he says when he appears? Peace be with you. It's an almost comic disconnect: It is no surprise that this whole incident proves a little stressful for the disciples.

Most of all it proves so for Thomas, so much so that he refuses to believe that it could be so. He refuses to believe that such a thing might have happened. In that doubt is perhaps a sense that Thomas has a deeper understanding. He realises that if the story of Easter is true then it changes absolutely everything completely. He doubts perhaps because he knows quite how scary the truth is. That God himself has died and risen again. He doesn't want to believe because the consequences of believing are too great. He knows that if it's true, any chances of a peaceful life in the conventional sense go out the window.

This is because the peace which Jesus offers to his disciples, the peace which he offers us, is not the same as the peace which we might seek in earth. God's peace is a riskier thing. It is not about our earthly comfort, but about nothing less than the reconciliation of our souls. Jesus offers that peace in the immediate aftermath of Easter for a reason: because it is by the Resurrection that this has been achieved. This peace has at its heart the idea that God has sought us out, where we were, as we are, and made us one with his love.

That is the peace of God- there is a reason why we say that it 'passes all understanding'. It is not our peace, it is not a perpetual doze on a lazy Sunday afternoon. It is much more. There will be times when we, like Thomas, might not understand it, might not even see or believe it. At such times we must know that the same God who is its source, is actively seeking us, actively showing us the marks of his deep love. These are the wounds that show us the price of this peace, the price of this grace, the price of this reconciliation to love.

Let us, this Easter tide, seek that stranger peace. Seek to have our lives changed by it, seek to feel our souls moved by it, seek to live in such a way that we too might one day exclaim: 'my Lord and my God'.

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