

Luke 24:36-49

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

"Sowing Seeds of Peace"

Each Sunday, we begin our service, as many other faith communities do with these words of greeting: "The peace of Christ be with you." To which we respond: "And also with you."

"Peace be with you."

We say these words to one another, yet I wonder how much thought we give to them after we say them to one another? "Peace be with you."

Peace has been on my mind and in my prayers as we deal with yet another mass shooting, this one in Indianapolis. We have had 45 mass shootings here in America in one month alone!

Peace be with you. I wonder if those words were offered by those who gathered with the family of the victims or to the first responders to help comfort their troubled hearts and minds?

I think about Jesus' four words as we hear about another police shooting of young black man, Daunte Wright, in Minneapolis or the 13 year-old boy who was recently shot by police in Chicago.

The epidemic of gun violence and mass shootings continue to escalate in America. Gun sales broke all kinds of sales records during the pandemic. People are fearful, and think that a gun can offer them some sense of protection and "peace of mind".

But that is not the peace Jesus speaks of when he greets his disciples. The peace Jesus offers is one of love and understanding of the sacred presence of God in each and every human being.

Ralph Waldo Emerson says: **"Peace cannot be achieved through violence, it can only be attained through understanding."**

Understanding one another as opposed to fearing and distrusting one another is key to peace.

It is also the foundation of a camping program called "Seeds of Peace Camp." (www.seedsofpeace.org)

The first camp was held in Maine. It's purpose was to bring together youth of faith, though not of the same faith.

The purpose of this camp was to bring together for the first time, young people, Christian, Muslim, and Jews, who lived in the war-torn countries of Palestine and Israel. Their hope was to give hope to these young people a new sense of the "other" people who lived in that violent, divided region by building relationships through summer fun activities in a camp setting.

In getting to know each other, learning about their lives, their faith, their struggles, they might build bridges to peace and not walls and acts of violence that continue to divide them.

Seeds of Peace has been a wonderful camp experience, with many of those young people who bunked together, played and laughed together, sat at the same meal table together, going on into leadership roles in their own countries.

While some would say, and we might agree, that the mission and purpose of Seeds of Peace Camp has failed, evidenced by the ongoing violence and war between those two countries, others would challenge that view.

In an article about Seeds of Peace Camp, in the Christian Century magazine, the camp is now expanding to bring together young people from Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan. Today, the camp has expanded to other locations in the United States, the Middle East, and South Asia.

Why am I lifting up this particular camp in a sermon and what does it have to do with our scriptures this morning?

Well, there once was this Jewish Palestinian boy named Jesus. He seemed to understand something about building bridges instead of walls between people of various faiths, political views, and cultures.

We tell stories about him all the time. He once lamented over the divisions in that same Middle East region, when he gazed upon Jerusalem, weeping over the city and its people, saying: "If you had only known the ways that lead to peace."

For all his efforts to heal the divisions, open people's eyes, teach them the way back to God through love, grace and forgiveness, he was killed.

Some would say, his mission was a failure. Peace, some might say, peace that Jesus taught us, though loving your neighbor as yourself, praying for your enemy, giving the coat off your back, leads us no closer to peace and reconciliation. Some would even argue that too many people have killed in the name of Jesus and still are doing so. Sadly, I would have to agree with them. Some people and groups have used the name of Jesus and the Christian faith

to lead people into battle and war, and do violence against other people, ever since the Emperor Constantine first did so with his Roman legions.

White Supremacists, Christian Nationalists, and others involved at the violent attack on our nation's Capital that led to the death of law enforcement officers, did so using the name of Jesus. Let us be clear, their actions were not in Christ's name nor are their actions peace related.

The Church is also complicit in its history, having done violence in its many forms towards other children of God, even as it speaks Jesus' words of greeting: Peace be with you.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he lamented over the city and the people with these words: **"If you had only known the ways that lead to peace."** His words still seem relevant for us today.

"Peace be with you."

To beat our guns, weapons, our policies and words that do violence to others might seem risky to some. But how can we be followers of the Prince of Peace, who greets us with the words "Peace be with you" and calls us to be "Peacemakers" if we do not take that risk?

Jesus isn't calling us to do anything he was not prepared to do himself. He went ahead of us on the journey, not instead of us.

Jesus was killed for showing us the way to God was through peace and not violence.

In response, Jesus does not turn to violence for revenge or encourage armed insurrection in retaliation for his suffering and death. The Risen One stands among his disciples and says to them "Peace be with you."

In the midst of our fear and the constant violence we continue to inflict on one another with our guns, our policies and our words, the Risen Christ still stands among us in our troubled, violent world, to bring healing and hope by calling us to lay down our weapons of violence and killing, by saying through our ministry in the Risen One "Peace be with you!"

These four words of Jesus may seem foolish to some compared to the power of a weapon. Perhaps they are to you? But as the Apostle Paul said, we are to be fools for Christ.

Maybe that is why a 17 year-old Arab Israeli/Palestinian boy named Asel Aseh, attended Seeds of Peace Camp, because he came to believe peace was possible.

Sadly, in his advocating for peace and reconciliation between Israel and Palestine, he was shot and killed by an Israeli police officer. He died wearing his Seeds of Peace Camp t-shirt.

In the article, Ned Lazarus, director of the Middle East program, said, some people will say, **“Look at all he did for peace, and he was still killed, so this is worthless.”** Lazarus, disagrees. He says, in his short life, this young man did some amazing things to bring about peace.

As one person said, Asel Alseh’s view of humanity was best described by these words of the 13th century poet, Rumi: **“Out beyond ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing, there is a field. I’ll meet you there.”**

I would like to believe, that as Children of God, and that is what we are, Children of God, we know where that field of peace is located. 17 year-old Asel Alseh is there and standing with him is the Risen Christ, greeting all who gather with the words: “Peace be with you.”

Amen.