

**shalom! Shalom!! SHALOM!!!**  
Reflections on John 20:19-31  
by Michael Barrett April 12, 2015

Peace be with you! Peace be with you!! Peace be with you!!!  
Shalom. Shalom. Shalom.

Today we hear Jesus literally shout to us disciples over the course of this, his Easter evening return. Jesus cries out the same word each time. Whatever else may have been said in that conversation, John records “Shalom,” three separate times. When we hear Jesus say something once, it may be a suggestion. If he repeats it, it’s likely a command. But, if he says it a third time, it’s definitely an imperative. Especially, if said within 8 verses.

To Jesus “Shalom” is central to his Creator-given mission of healing. We hear ‘shalom’ and think peace. To our Lord, shalom means much more than just an absence of agitation, discord, or outright conflict. Jesus is talking absolute peace.

Jesus is offering the peace of perfection, contentment, and fullness; the peace of prosperity, well-being, and good health; and the peace of harmony, tranquility, and safety. That’s Jesus’ shalom and that, is a peace worth shouting about. My brothers and sisters shalom is of signal significance to Jesus. For a few moments, let us take the time to listen to what Jesus is saying within in the context of that locked room.

SHALOM! – and then he shows them his hands and feet.

The first word he speaks to his disciples is shalom and his first action is to show his disciples his hands and feet, still bearing the marks and the scars of crucifixion remaining thereupon.

Why? Why would he do that first? Indeed, John provides the most graphically explicit account of the crucifixion – description of nails, outpouring of blood, and that spear thrust into Jesus’ side are each unique to this gospel, but this is not just more gory detail on the part of John.

John is disclosing that Jesus is maintaining his crucifixion identity. Crucifixion is not some single tortuous experience undergone by Jesus on his career path as he marches onto resurrection glory. His crucifixion cannot be relegated into the past. It cannot be forgotten. The resurrected Christ continues to live on also as the crucified Jesus.

Jesus is manifesting his divinity – I AM truly God, but at the same time he is proclaiming that he is still truly human – he is revealing, after it all, that he is still one of us. He is asking us to take peace in those scars of love, expressing the depth of love that he bears for us. What Jesus experienced at Golgotha marks him throughout all eternity. On the cross, Jesus said, “It is Finished.” What is finished? What is finished is the power of death and suffering and sin over us. The price has been paid for our failures. Our peace has been purchased on that cross. This is the shalom found in God’s love.

*SHALOM! As the Father sent me, I am sending you. And with that he BREATHED on them and said, " receive the HOLY SPIRIT. If you forgive anyone their sins they are forgiven, if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

Jesus' disciples should not, cannot, and will not stay behind the security of locked doors. Joy in Jesus is not an end within itself. Resurrection is not some private culminating miraculous experience. Resurrection is one piece in God's strategy to heal the world, one piece in Jesus' mission to heal the world, and resurrection is now one piece in our mission to help heal the world. My friends, we have just been authorized, commissioned to participate in God's greatest desire – to heal this world.

Healing the world is a very, very tall order. So Jesus now does two more things.

First, Jesus knows that we cannot heal the world all by ourselves. We need a source of colossal and continuous power to guide and energize us. Therefore Jesus breathes on us and asks us to receive the Holy Spirit.

This is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus breathes on anyone. Where else in Scripture do we find God breathing on people?

Genesis 2:7 – the Lord God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life.

Psalms 104:29-30 – the Lord also withdraws His breath.

Jesus is enhancing Genesis. He is enabling his disciples (ones who only follow) to become apostles (ones who are sent out). Jesus is going to live on not because he can saunter through dead bolted doors, or parade around in a dazzling white outfit or show off his non-fatal wounds. Jesus chooses to live on by breathing life into his disciples, new and old, and by sending them out to heal the world in his name. Peace is not a happy state of affairs. Peace is a means, a mission, and a movement.

Second, Jesus knows we cannot go out and heal the world if we are spending our time accusing, blaming, and censuring each other. So, Jesus shares with us, the community of his followers, one of God's exclusive prerogatives -- the power to forgive. He has already announced, mediated, and modeled forgiveness all his life. He knows the life of his community requires forgiveness. Forgiveness is an essential element in any community if its life breath in the Holy Spirit is the healing mission of Jesus.

And forgiveness is just as important to the giver as it is to the one receiving it. As Lewis Smedes wrote, "when you forgive, you set a prisoner free. Then you discover that the prisoner was you." Jesus gave us the power of forgiveness for our own individual sake as well as for the sakes of our brothers and sisters.

If we do not forgive, if we continue to harbor grudges and resentments and anger toward one another, yes then truly those sins are not be forgiven. Those sins will remain, spoiling the unity of fellowship, and the spirit of Jesus cannot survive in such a community.

When we love and forgive one another as Jesus loves and forgives then we reveal God to the world. When we reveal God to the world we enable the world to enter a relationship with a loving and forgiving God. When we are in relationship with a loving and forgiving God, we love and forgive one another as Jesus loves and forgives us. You may be familiar with “vicious cycles” – Jesus gives us the “peaceful cycle.”

This is the shalom found in Christian community.

*SHALOM! – then he said to Thomas, “put your finger here, see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side.”*

This shalom, is less about poor stereotyped, maligned through the ages, Thomas of doubt, but more about the character and grace of Jesus. Jesus is so determined to reach Thomas, Jesus again returns to that locked room. Our Lord could have given up on Thomas or turned the responsibility for him over to the other disciples. But, he did not. Jesus is so determined for Thomas to believe in him that he reappears just for Thomas and he offers him the opportunity to do just what Thomas had demanded earlier. Just as with Thomas, Jesus will return again and again for each of us. Jesus will simply not give up on any of us.

Hear that nowhere does Jesus criticize the disciples for hiding out behind closed doors, nor does Jesus berate Thomas for wanting a primary one-on-one personal experience. God comes to our level of need and not we, as expected, to his.

With Yahweh, it is acceptable to be afraid, it is acceptable to want more, it is acceptable to inquire about things, and it is acceptable to demand more. Whatever it takes for you to believe, ask for it. Our Creator hard-wired us to ask questions, to inquire about things, to try and to sort things out, and to think things through. Don't ignore your doubts – embrace them – but then seek answers. Ask God for a meeting.

Where in the Bible does it say that it's wrong to ask questions or wrong to admit that we don't understand what's going on or wrong to ask God to clarify something or even wrong to complain to God? Nowhere. Dealing with doubt often may be the avenues leading to greater faith. Doubters and disbelievers are not the same. At sometime, most of us have doubts about a lot of things, but those doubts do not require us to abandon our faith or to abdicate our given responsibilities.

Henry Drummond made some telling distinctions about doubter and disbelievers:

A doubter is a person who searches for God and the Godly life. A doubter is on a journey, a quest, a search to find God and the love of God.

A disbeliever isn't searching for God but seeks more often; those situations that he perceives will bring him or her greater personal happiness.

A doubter is a person who has a thousand question for God – about love, life, suffering, divinity, resurrection, trinity . . .

A disbeliever is a person who doesn't ask questions of or about God or the any spiritual dimension. He is apathetic to God.

A doubter is a person who struggles with God and struggles to live a Godly life and struggles to find the purpose of life.

A disbeliever is a person who only struggles with the day-to-day crises of this life.

My corollaries:

A doubter is a person who may make a doubter out of a disbeliever. A disbeliever may relate more readily to a doubter than a proselytizing believer. A doubter may be a person who more easily unbolts the door of a disbeliever.

A disbeliever is a person who may actually deepen a believer's faith. A disbeliever is a person whose challenge may strengthens the believer's faith through justification of that faith or refinement of that faith by rejection of what is not justified.

God expects us to bring our issues, concerns and doubts to Him. God welcomes encounters with us. It's part of our relationship with Him. Encounter with God is the channel of blessing. Just like the encounter between Jesus and Thomas in today's reading. The result of that encounter is the climax of John's gospel!

"My Lord and God" – a supreme profession of faith. Thomas is the first person in John's gospel to express the belief that God is fully revealed in Jesus. And then Jesus uses this encounter to send us, his later disciples a message. "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN AND YET HAVE BELIEVED." That's to us – the disciples there had seen him and believed. This is our blessing directly from Jesus. This is the shalom of personal faith.

Jesus brings us peace in the shalom of Easter. It is a revolutionary peace and it has only just begun. This is the second Sunday OF Easter, not after Easter.

As N.T. Wright one wrote, "if Easter brings order to the world's confusion, it also brings confusion to the world's order – opening up undreamed possibilities, not so much of random miracles, but of a new creation in a place of decay, of new peace in place of war." A new shalom. An eternal peace.

My brothers and sisters, may we each and all now go forward, blessed in shalom of God's love for us, and in the shalom of God's trust and forgiveness for us, and in the shalom of God's faith in us, in Jesus' name, to build a kingdom of shalom. Amen