The Rev. Kimberly Reinholz
Church of the Holy Spirit
April 12, 2026
John 20:19-30

Jesus greets the disciples: "Peace be with you."

In English, Peace is often thought of as the absence of violence. But the Hebrew word Jesus would have used, “Shalom,” encompasses more than that. Jesus greets his friends with a desire for wholeness, completeness, and safety to be with them. The disciples are feeling anything but safe. John describes them as locked in the room out of fear. It is intentional to say 'peace be with you' first to start assuaging their anxiety. Similarly, the angels told Mary Magdalene on Easter not to be afraid. Jesus greets his friends, showing them that he is present, whole, and safe. This is his desire for them as well: to stay safe, together, and complete. That is exactly what they are when they stay together in community, with one another and with God as their guide. They are able to experience shalom.

The disciples were certainly not at peace when Jesus greeted them in the locked room. Who would feel whole, complete, and safe after all that had happened? First, their rabbi was arrested and executed. Then, it seemed someone had stolen his body. They feared arrest and crucifixion for insurrection. Most were from the countryside, yet they were in Jerusalem, and their leader was gone. Some of them had even started heading back to Galilee. To say they were lost, confused, and threatened would be an understatement.

Thomas wasn’t there the first night, and he has questions. This is fair. Why is Thomas called "doubting" just for asking to see the wounds and place his hands in Jesus’ side? He doesn't ask for more than what the others asked Mary Magdalene after the resurrection. They wanted proof of what she had seen. The resurrection is impossible, inexplicable, and remains a unique miracle. It seems healthy, normal, and realistic to question the story of a man appearing in a locked room, just days after his execution.

The second time Jesus presents himself in the locked room, he allows Thomas to see the wounds and touch his side, and then Jesus blesses those who are able to believe without seeing. This blessing is the assurance we have that our belief is valid even without firsthand experience. Thomas asked the question, and, as tradition dictates, John shared the story for our benefit. It is because of this doubt that we are given access to peacefulness. God's peace that passes all human understanding is freely offered to us by Jesus in this moment of reunification between himself and his camp of followers. This is when Jesus is completely restored to his human community as well.

While Jesus becomes known to Mary by calling her name, and to Cleopas while traveling to Emmaus in the breaking of bread, Jesus greets his disciples as a integrated group, with a familiar greeting. These various ways of meeting people after the resurrection indicate that Jesus remembers those he loved, and he is not an imposter. Jesus needs sustenance, so he is not a ghost. Jesus calls them and invites his followers to continue in their communal relationship, reminding us that in all times and in all places the Holy Trinity shows us how to live in relationship to one another. We need others to be whole, like Jesus needs God and the

Holy Spirit to be the Holy Trinity, one God, now and forever.

The need for Christians to be in community to be Holy, Good, and Peaceful reflects the Holy Trinity's relationship with itself. We greet one another with a sign of peace as a way of extending God's peace. We are made complete, whole, and safe when we are brought together. Community is not only found within these walls. We are also sent out into the world to share the sense of belonging, wholeness, and safety with all whom we meet. The peace of God, who loves, created, and cares for each of us, is shared with all those we meet along the way—in our work, neighborhoods, schools, anywhere we roam.

As Episcopalians, we use the phrase "The Peace of the Lord be with you" in our Eucharistic liturgies and common prayers. Within these practices, unique traditions form in congregations. The intention is to provide a moment of reconciliation before we come to the altar. We share a sense of wholeness, completeness, and safety. In a community with such love, and where we are not persecuted as the disciples were, it seems we need to share peace not just with each other but also with the world.

With this in mind, the question arises: how do we share the peace of Christ with our neighbors beyond these walls?

We have been invited to participate in an innovative and exciting opportunity in our community this spring and summer. On June 14, Flag Day, flags will be installed between the Red Mill and the Hunterdon Art Museum. The desire is to collect 500 flags that respond to the prompt: "What does peace mean to you?" Please take out your bulletin. You will

see an empty square on the front. While it is not to scale for the 9 x 9-inch squares we will use in a few weeks, now is a good time to sketch, write, draw, color, or plot out any ideas that come to mind when you consider what peace means to you.

There are art supplies, Bibles to look up scripture references, prayer books, and hymnals for you to peruse. Perhaps the windows and icons of other art throughout the space may inspire you.

But for now, spend a few minutes considering Peace. It is the sincere hope of the team putting together this workshop—Tricia, Dale, and Janet—that you will join other members of the congregation and our greater Hunterdon County community on April 25th between 10 am and 12 noon in Dove Hall. There, you can add your design to a flag, which will be blessed on April 26th and then delivered to Clinton for the coordinators.

In about 5 minutes, I will bring us back to continue our liturgy, reciting the Nicene Creed. If you wander off, leaving the sanctuary in search of peaceful inspiration, be mindful of that.

(5-minute interlude)

Let peace be with you.