

## Easter – Week Three of Easter 2021

**Acts 3:13-15; Psalm 4; 1 John 2:1-5; Luke 24:35-48**

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*'Peace, be with you.'* Jesus says to his startled and frightened disciples. He then proceeds to show them the wounds on his hands and feet to show them that he was indeed their crucified friend, and then he asks *'Have you anything here to eat?'*, a single question that shows he is not a ghost but standing before them in flesh and blood, and it draws them back from gawking and disbelief to the commonplace civility of looking after a friend's or visitor's everyday needs such as food. Perhaps it was the equivalent of *'Aren't you going to ask me if I want a cup of tea?'*

What is this 'Peace' that Jesus is offering? It is not a peace that means a life without suffering: We know that many of the disciples will die because they proclaim the Easter Story, that Jesus is raised from the dead. We know it is not a peace without confrontation: the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles has Peter accusing his listeners – his fellow Israelites – of betraying God and killing Jesus and calling them to repentance. We know that calling anyone to repentance is bound to cause friction because it requires you to point out what someone has done wrong. So what is this peace?

Imagine that you are sat down by a pond. All is quite, and warm. Perhaps there is a gentle buzz and hum of insects. Nothing moves. The water lies still and untroubled. In your mind you reach out into this stillness and you feel quite in harmony with this silence and calm. Is the peace which Jesus offers you found here? It starts to rain a little, intermittent drops at first which disturb the glass-like surface. You barely notice. The rain increases, steadily. The sky darkens and clouds obscure the Sun. A throaty rumble creates un-ease in the air, emphasising the silence. The wind increases, causing a low moaning through the trees and grasses that

surround the pond. The waters stir and start to slap at the edge as the wind pushes it, the waters from the heavens start to fall in a deluge, constant and dreadful, obscuring sound and sight, until all is water and wind. And you remain unmoved, deep in your cocoon of tranquillity, impervious to the great forces of nature that sweep and swirl, boom and collide around you. Have you reached the highest heaven of meditation, withdrawn and in union with God. Is this the peace we are offered?

Remove the pond.

Life is good. You marry, have children and are happy. You have a good job, are successful and are well thought of. You even make time to go to church. You are a go-to person in the community. You have nice holidays, a good home and recognise the value of a good wine and good company at your table. You are not particularly proud, and you just get on with 'it', with life. You are content and in control. Is this the peace we are offered?

It starts to rain a little. A gentle breeze carries a noise from far away, it sounds like muffled voices raised in anger. Marriage falls away, life can be purchased or discarded as your right. Boys and girls cut and chemicalise themselves so that they can become someone else than who they are. Differences of sex and colour and culture and opinion are eroded, exaggerated, expunged or ignored: all collides into one in the storm. The rain increases. You barely notice. The forces of law and order bow before a new-order that tosses and turns its head, snarls and foams destroying, turning the muffled voices into inarticulate sounds of rage devoid of sense and meaning, incapable of sustaining but only of destroying. The forces of man sweep and swirl, boom and collide around you. You remain steadfast and untouched. Is this the peace we are offered?

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No. *'Peace be with you'* is offered by the Crucified Jesus, not one who rises above suffering and says it had no meaning, but gives suffering its meaning through enduring love. *'Peace be with you'* is not offered by a purely spiritualised Jesus, but a Jesus who knows in his flesh and bones what it means to be hungry and what it means to be fed. *'Peace be with you'* does not mean find yourself a spot of tranquillity, either by a pond or in your home, and lose yourself to a higher reality. *'Peace be with you'* means listening to God the Father, and then opening your eyes to the world through the heart of Jesus. This is the peace that Jesus offers, not to rise above life, but to truly enter into it. In this peace we know it is raining and we give and take shelter in God.

*Peace, be with you.' 'Have you anything here to eat?'*