



## “Living a Resurrected Life”

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*John 20:19-31*

Diane Roth, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Conroe, Texas, told a story about a friend of hers who took a trip to Europe with her husband. They were touring cathedrals in Spain and their tour guides would take them around the cathedrals, reporting on the architecture and the art, the history and the culture of the area. Often there would be a mass in session when visiting the cathedrals. Well, during one of their tours, their guide warned them to beware of thieves and to keep their purses, wallets, and bags close to them at all times. And this was good advice because in the middle of a tour of one of the most famous cathedrals, Roth’s friend was startled when a woman came up to her and said some words with her hands outstretched. This friend, remembering the warnings, shrank back in caution and concern. It was not until afterward that she recognized the woman’s words: *La paz de Dios*. The peace of God. The woman in the cathedral wasn’t trying to rob her, she was sharing the peace.

On this second Sunday of Easter, we hear the familiar story of Thomas. And I have to tell you I almost didn’t use this scripture for today because this story of doubting Thomas presents itself after Easter every single year. I mean, how much more can really be said about how Thomas was absent the crucifixion and didn’t believe what happened? How much more do we need to know about the doubting disciple who wanted proof, the one who put his fingers in the nail torn flesh of Jesus’s hands and touched the wound on his side? I could preach on how we are like Thomas and doubt rather than have faith or how we need a resurrected Christ to come to us and reveal the next steps so we can move forward.

While Thomas may hold the traditional leading role in this passage, I’d like for us to notice the supporting characters. You see, I think that many of us can identify with the huddled, scared disciples. We are afraid to leave the safe prison of our fears. We don’t want to let anyone into the locked rooms of our lives. And, when we focus on those other disciples rather than Thomas, it becomes apparent that we have missed something crucial. We have overlooked the beginning of this story. We have skimmed right past the most important piece of the text: Jesus showed up with a word of peace. He walked right into the locked room, and the first words he said were, “Peace be with you.” Jesus showed up to pass the peace. He approached the fearful disciples and spoke *La paz de Dios*. And it wasn’t just a simple greeting. It wasn’t just Jesus saying “hello” or “good evening.” It was something more than that. It was Jesus showing the frightened followers that in order to live resurrected lives they needed to show up and that they needed to bring words of peace.

The first thing we must do as Easter people living resurrected lives is to show up. We must show up! Following Jesus is communal. We need others and they need us. We come to church to remind each other that we have abundant, resurrected lives and a Savior who showed up at the

cross for us. And so, as resurrected people, it is important that we too show up. We must show up when our friends and loved ones are being deported. We must show up when someone is having surgery and needs a hand to hold. We must show up for those being incarcerated unfairly. We must show up to District Attorney forums to share our faithful message of a just society. We must show up to school board meetings to fight for our kids. We must show up at Youth Believing in Change to read books and sing songs. We must show up at North Dallas Shared Ministry to sort clothes and stack food for people in need. We must show up. To live as resurrected people is to show up.

One of our members, Dottie Brashear, told me what living a resurrected life meant to her. She said, “I see God as love. Resurrection means love triumphs all, heals, and conquers death. So, if I subscribe to that, I’m called to the verb love, not just the feeling. For me, that means showing up. Showing up when it’s not convenient, easy or, quite frankly, I just don’t want to be bothered. Show up. For the silenced, the person that’s hurting (from my actions or another’s), for the good and the uncomfortable. When my default is cynicism and self-protection, I rely on love to help me show up anyways.”

That is so true. Jesus showed up at the cross out of love. Jesus felt the pain, the loneliness, the fear, the rejection that we too have felt in our lives. And because Jesus felt what it was like to live in our flesh, we know that he is with us, abiding with us, being present with us. Jesus is present with us in our resurrected lives and since Jesus is with us, breathing life into us, the best gift we can offer to someone who is suffering is our presence. Being able to sit with someone else’s pain, to be available and undistracted, to bear witness to and share in their feelings is important as we live resurrected lives. One of my favorite authors, Brené Brown, defines empathy as “feeling with people.” Even if we’ve never faced the circumstances the other person is facing, chances are we’ve experienced the same feelings at one time or another. Empathy is tapping in to those feelings and knowing that we are all huddled in the locked room of fear and we need a risen Jesus to break in and breathe new life.

Henri Nouwen wrote, “When we honestly ask ourselves which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.” As Easter people who live resurrected lives we are beckoned to follow Jesus who showed up in Jerusalem, who showed up in the Upper Room, who showed up in Gethsemane, who showed up at the cross, and who later showed up in a locked room of fearful disciples, to tell them that they must come out of hiding and show up. They must show up to those who are hurting, to those who are on the margins, to those who have lost hope, to the Gentiles, to the Jews, to all people in all the land. We live resurrected lives by showing up.

The other way we live resurrected lives is by sharing peace. In our congregation, we pass the peace on communion Sundays. And today, we will do just that at the end of the service. Sharing the peace can seem rather raucous as we cross aisles, greet one another with hearty handshakes and hugs, and reassure each other that we are held in God’s arms and in the love of Christ. At

times, it seems only the triumphant doxology can rescue us. I bet passing the peace can be rather intimidating for visitors who want to remain anonymous or for those of us who feel like a word of peace will only touch the tip of the iceberg of our frazzled lives.

At the cathedral in Spain, a word of peace caused Roth's friend to recoil in fear. She did not understand the woman's words. Was the lady coming up to her a friend or an enemy? Was she going to harm or help? I wonder if the disciples felt the same way. I wonder if they were shocked and scared as their savior suddenly showed up. After all, they weren't expecting a living Jesus to walk through the doors. The doors were locked. They expected an enemy, a religious leader, a centurion, someone who would be coming to arrest them, hurt them, or even kill them. But no, it was Jesus. And the first thing the resurrected Jesus offered them after showing up in that fearful room was peace. "Not a peaceful evening by the fire, not even peace of mind, not the absence of conflict, [but] peace," according to Roth. She continues, "Peace be with you: it's peace as reconciliation, which I can't help thinking is really and truly rare... whatever has separated us in the past no longer separates us—it's that kind of peace."

Does having peace mean that everything is going well and that we won't have conflict, we won't have pain, we won't have heartbreak and heartache? Does having peace mean that we won't need to hide in our locked rooms, shivering in fear and weak from exhaustion? No, but we live resurrected lives when we notice what Jesus did that next week after his death, even in the midst of our fears. Jesus showed up and passed the peace. And that is what we are called to do. We need to show up and we need to pass the peace. Sure, we have the freedom to live a resurrected life because Christ has been victorious over death and we are assured eternal life, a dwelling and being with the one who created us. That's the easy answer. But maybe it's also about giving us peace to share with the world: a peace that passes all understanding, a peace that redeems the unredeemable, a peace that crosses all boundaries, a peace that calms all fears, a peace that reaches out and embraces all that separates us.

And so much separates us. We are engaged in so many debates these days about who is in and who is out, who is worthy and who is not, whom we are afraid of and who fears us. We need to pass the peace. We need to pass the peace in that space that separates us from immigrants. We need to pass the peace in that space that separates us from our Muslim neighbors. We need to pass the peace in that space that separates us from our LGBTQ siblings. We need to pass the peace in that space that separates us from someone with a different political idea. We need to pass the peace in that space that separates us from someone who has a different skin color. We need to pass the peace in that space that separates us from someone who has been beaten up by drug or alcohol abuse. We need to pass the peace in that space that separates us from those who struggle to get out of crushing debt. We need to pass the peace with those in debilitating depression and piercing pain. We need to pass the peace.

While serving on staff at South Main Baptist Church in Houston, Amanda and I went on a mission trip to Collique, Peru. Collique is one of the poorest cities in Peru and among the poorest in the world. Through a non-profit ministry organization, Operacion San Andres, South Main member, Dr. Luis Campos, bought property and set up an ongoing ministry with a community center and medical clinic to be able to treat diseases, give dental exams, and build relationships with children and families. One day while we were there, South Main's pastor, Steve Wells, and

I were taken to the home of a mother and her two children. The house was made out of corrugated tin loosely propped together over a dirt floor. They had a water barrel right outside the home for collecting rainwater and very occasionally city water when the trucks would make their way to the small town. When I peered in the four-foot-tall blue plastic bin, I noticed just a few inches of stale and mildewed water steeping in the bottom of the container. The people in Collique were cut off, isolated and alone. The government didn't care about them. No one chose to show up. No one arrived to pass the peace. And so that's what we did.

As Amanda and I taught Bible stories and songs to the children of Collique, there was a language barrier between us. We couldn't truly communicate with each other until we showed up in each other's space and passed the peace to one another. We couldn't overcome that which separated us... until we started to sing. "Cristo ama a los ninos, pues los ninos son de El, No le importa tu color, Solo quiere de tu amor, Cristo ama a los ninos por igual." We showed up, we sang the words of Jesus loving the little children, and we bridged that space that separated us. We looked into the eyes of these divinely created Peruvian kids and felt a peace that passed all understanding. And it felt like life to me, it felt like resurrection.

*La paz de Dios.* Nothing can separate us. Show up and bring peace. Maybe that is what it means to live a resurrected life.

Amen.