

**Easter 3B**  
**April 18, 2021**  
**Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
**Lakeland, FL**

**Acts 3:12-19**  
**Psalm 4**  
**1 John 3:1-7**  
**Luke 24:36b-48**

Grace to you and peace from God and from our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

It was a quiet afternoon. I was in my comfortable chair doing some reading. Sadie was on the couch curled into a tight little circle. Suddenly, her head popped up and her ears twitched from side to side. Then she was up on her back legs looking over the top of the couch and then in a split second she dashed as if her life depended on it. And then the roar of the F/A-18 Super Hornets surrounded us as if they were looking for a landing spot in my backyard. And I was terrified. Adrenalin coursed through me, my heart raced. And a scream got stuck in my throat.

And, as I think back over the headlines of this past week, much less the past few weeks, there is a scream that gets stuck in my throat. Forty-five mass shootings in this country in the past month. A 9 minute 29 second video of one human being kneeling on the neck of another squeezing the breath and the life out of him. A Russian military build-up along its border with the Ukraine. Major cities in our country either reeling from or preparing for protests against inequities long experienced in our society. Mounting tensions with Iran. And, of course, the ongoing pall of the pandemic. My friends in Christ, it is just too much, isn't it.

And perhaps it may seem a little hollow to shout out "He is risen."

It was into similar turmoil two thousand years ago that Jesus came and said, "Peace be with you." And, that may have sounded to his followers then a little bit hollow too. As people who live two thousand years removed from that time, we miss the harsh realities of those days and the many screams that got stuck in throats as well as those that were uttered.

This land had been conquered and occupied ruled by one foreign entity after another – the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks and then Rome. And this occupation was not by a benign dictator – it was by a cruel emperor. Life was difficult, conditions were brutal. Poverty was the "way things were." Sickness and death were all around. Disease and disability and infirmity. Children weren't even named until they were past toddlerhood because the child mortality rate was so high.

And into this came an itinerant rabbi. One who taught that the Kingdom of God had come near, a kingdom in which love was the guiding principle. A kingdom in which the first would be last, where the powerful and influential are cast down from their seats in high places and the lowly are lifted up. And the people began following this rabbi named Jesus. He taught and touched and healed and loved. And the religious elites and the political leaders started to take note and worried at the lasting impact of such a kingdom, such a teacher. But oh the people loved him. And when he was arrested and charged and summarily convicted and executed, the screams of his followers were stuck in their throats – lest they be next. They stayed holed up behind locked doors hardly knowing what would be next. And then further degradation when the body was not to be found. And as they were together puzzling over all of this, suddenly there was one in their

midst, urging “Peace be with you.” Audacious, isn’t it? In the midst of all of this turmoil, in the midst of worries for personal safety, in the midst of the seeming loss of the meaning of their lives, into the midst of this grief and confusion – comes this beckoning to peace. Really?

Now, we need to think about this peace a bit. It is not a cessation of conflicts. It is not a double dose of safety. It is not even a peaceful easy feeling. The peace with which Jesus met his followers is rather an earnest wish for wholeness, for completeness in one’s being, for harmony. It is that which one experiences when there is a settled-ness at the end of the day. And this peace does not depend upon me and what I do. This peace is a piece of God’s grace. I saw a plaque once that said, “Sometimes God calms the storm around his child; other times he calms his child in the midst of the storm.” That is the peace of Jesus. This peace is also that of which we sing when we proclaim, “Great is Thy Faithfulness” or “Blessed Assurance.”

Even in these days of ours, even when all seems to be going wrong, even when we have tied a knot and are hanging on to the end of our rope. In the midst of all of this, Jesus comes along side of us in ways we don’t fully understand. In the midst of this, Jesus beckons us with the peace that passes human understanding. In the midst of this, we gather together to pray and worship and learn and care and to greet one another with this peace. And in this, we are nourished with Easter light and hope. Death and difficulty and turmoil and struggle will not have the last word. Because – He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God.

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you,  
    wherever he may send you;  
may he guide you through the wilderness,  
    protect you through the storm;  
may he bring you home rejoicing,  
    at the wonders he has shown you;  
may he bring you home rejoicing,  
    once again into our doors.

The blessing of God Almighty,  
    the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit  
    is with you and will remain with you forever.