

# Third Sunday of Easter

Year B

RCL

1 John 3:1-7

Psalm 4

Luke 24:36b-48



## The Collect

### The Collect

O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Psalm 4

*Cum invocarem*

- 1 Answer me when I call, O God, defender of my  
cause; \*  
you set me free when I am hard-pressed;  
have mercy on me and hear my prayer.
- 2 “You mortals, how long will you dishonor my glory;  
\*  
how long will you worship dumb idols  
and run after false gods?”
- 3 Know that the LORD does wonders for the faithful; \*  
when I call upon the LORD, he will hear me.
- 4 Tremble, then, and do not sin; \*  
speak to your heart in silence upon your bed.
- 5 Offer the appointed sacrifices \*  
and put your trust in the LORD.
- 6 Many are saying, “Oh, that we might see better  
times!” \*  
Lift up the light of your countenance upon us, O  
LORD.
- 7 You have put gladness in my heart, \*

more than when grain and wine and oil increase.

8 I lie down in peace; at once I fall asleep; \*  
for only you, LORD, make me dwell in safety.

**1 John 3:1-7**

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

**Luke 24:36b-48**

Jesus himself stood among the disciples and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and

the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”

## SERMON

I want to reflect on something I told you last Sunday. It was from William James, a 19<sup>th</sup> Century psychologist. He wrote that religion “consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto.”<sup>1</sup> He isn't alone in this understanding. In his 1963 encyclical “Pacem in Terris”, Pope John XXIII asserted:

**That a marvelous order predominates in the world of living beings and in the forces of nature ... Peace on Earth—which man throughout the ages has so longed for and sought after—can never be established, never guaranteed, except by the diligent observance of the divinely established order.**

My favorite atheist and all-round troublesome person, Frederich Nietzsche, shared his thoughts:

**“If I wished to shake this tree with my hands, I should not be able to do so. But the**

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<sup>1</sup> “The Varieties of Religious Experience”

**wind, which we see not, troubleth and bendeth it as it listeth. We are sorest bent and troubled by invisible hands.”<sup>2</sup>**

If people of such diverse understandings as William James, Pope John XXIII and Frederich Nietzsche are right, why in the world would anyone fail to harmoniously adjust themselves to this unseen order? Who doesn't desire his or her supreme good? That so few pursue it implies strongly that there are other forces at work here. There must actually be some voice to which we give greater heed even than we do to the pursuit of our supreme good! What is this seductive force which seeks our disappointment and destruction? Pope John names it:

**And yet there is a disunity among individuals and among nations which is in striking contrast to this perfect order in the universe. One would think that the relationships that**

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<sup>2</sup> “Also Sprach Zarathustra”



**bind men together could only be governed by force.**

And he nails it. Might makes right is our mantra. If we are mighty, we are righteous. The writer of 1 John begs to differ.

Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

Might doesn't make righteousness. Righteousness lies elsewhere. What sort of a powerful force is it that can divert us from so praise-worthy and desirable a goal? What's stopping us? Is it not fear? Fear of others. Fear of harm. Fear for our families. We're scared to death all the time and apparently, we like it that way, so fiercely do we cling to our fears. We talk a good tale

about peace and love, but when push comes to shove, we get out the artillery. That is a working definition of sin, right there. Sin is, at its heart, the tendency of humans to turn their backs on the unseen order prescribed by God and, instead, pay homage to our fears and thirst for security. We're told that rapists are pouring over our southern border and we believe it as if "rapist" was a profession. Something must be done! Sharia law (whatever that is) is being imposed upon powerless and innocent Americans. Something must be done! We fear and our immediate reaction is a rush for the artillery, for might makes right. The one thing we NEVER think about is that we are all in this together.

see what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now;

Rabbi Mark Perman posted on Facebook today:

**As my Rabbi of blessed memory, Marshall Meyer used to say (paraphrasing): “There is one consequence to our belief in one God, and that is that since we are all children of God, we are all brothers and sisters.”**

We are all children of God, therefore we are all brothers and sisters. Should one of our family members suffer or fall ill, do we not pray for healing? When we see brothers and sisters outside our family groups suffering and falling ill, why do we not pray for healing? Do we believe in the power of faith to make us strong and to heal us? I know we probably say we do, but do we really believe it? And do our actions match our prayers?

This is not an ancient world version of self-help. It does not point us to some magic words that we can say to feel better about our guilt. It is recognizing that at the very heart of our humanity, we are all in the same boat.

Rich, poor, male, female, heterosexual, homosexual, transgender, Greek, Muslim, Jew, white, brown, black, Hispanic, Arab, Caucasian, or Asian. The hard truth is that we are all in this together. It's a sinking ship that we built ourselves and we keep building it.<sup>3</sup>

Of what is our sinking boat constructed? Its foundations rest on the absolute certainty that might makes right. It is bolted together with fear of others. It is hammered with nails of the tribalism which still whispers from stone age caves to the board rooms of the present. It is that thing which the Prince of Peace spoke to by his death and resurrection. It is the enemy of peacemaking and the Covenant of Reconciliation.

**Peacemaking doesn't mean passivity. It is the act of interrupting injustice without mirroring injustice, the act of disarming evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of**

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<sup>3</sup> Discipleship Ministries, UMC, Third Sunday of Easter

**finding a third way that is neither fight nor flight but the careful, arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressors free. Peacemaking is about being able to recognize in the face of the oppressed our own faces, and in the hands of the oppressors our own hands.<sup>4</sup>**

This week, Gerry, Jolene, and I visited with the mayor and the chief of police in Huntington to learn from them the tactics they are employing in their fight against this horrible opioid epidemic. I hadn't walked the streets of downtown Huntington in quite a while. I was frightened. I saw people sitting on the sidewalks, people that my experience in law enforcement taught me to be cautious of. I actually longed for my sidearm, and believe me! That hasn't happened in a very long time. My fear of the street people was screaming "Danger!" so loudly

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Brueggeman — From "A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals"

that I could no longer see children of God before me, instead seeing demons who would do me harm. In that two block walk from the parking garage to the city building I walked in the emotionalism that powers our response to the addiction epidemic threatening us, the emotionalism that grants us permission to close our eyes to the suffering around us, and thereby permits this epidemic to grow and spread, even to taking from us our very children! That these people who I so feared are living excluded from our society is injustice. That I could so easily fall into agreement with it is even more unjust. My fear was so great that I could not consider the act of interrupting injustice without mirroring injustice, the act of disarming evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of finding a third way that is neither fight nor flight but the careful, arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. All I could engage was a flight to

the safe, civilized marble hallways of the city building.

Clearly, the addicted brought this on themselves, my sinful heart told me. Nobody made them inject heroin. It's their own fault, and I owe them no duty of compassion. Then, I thought, what if they were dying of lung cancer from a lifetime of smoking? Would I then be such a judgmental demon? Would I not seek to comfort? Is this not a devastating confession from one who has dedicated twelve years to standing before you and trying to speak of the teachings of Christ? Could I, in the short space of two city blocks, have turned my back on everything I have told you?

I could. I did. I feared.

**Peacemaking begins with what we can change — ourselves. But it doesn't end there. We are to be peacemakers in a world riddled with violence. That means interrupting violence with imagination, on our streets**

**and in our world. Peacemaking “that is not like any way the empire brings peace” is rooted in the nonviolence of the cross, where we see a Savior who loves his enemies so much that he died for them.<sup>5</sup>**

AMEN

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



## BENEDICTION

Each Sunday, we extend a hand and say, “Peace be with you.” That is no empty phrase, no Christian form of “Hey! How you doin?” It is the very words of the Lord.

Jesus himself stood among the disciples and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

Was I able to extend a hand to those I feared on the street? Did I share the peace of our Lord with them? I did not. I failed them and I failed you. I was too frightened and the only response I could make was to pray

Lord Jesus Christ, son of God,  
Have mercy on me, a sinner.

May we, as a country sickened by this epidemic, have the courage to approach those of God's children enslaved, and offer the Peace of Christ.

The Lord bless you and keep you;

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the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

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*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

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