

Peace Be with You

*Jesus came and stood in their midst
and said to them, "Peace be with you."
When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.
The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. – John 20:19-21*

After a confusing Easter morning filled with bizarre messages, "The stone was moved," "His body is not there," "The burial clothes still are," "Mary says that she saw him."

Jesus appears for the first time to his friends as a group. The Gospel of John says that they were gathered in a locked room — fearful of being found together and arrested by the temple leaders — when suddenly Jesus is there in their midst. "Peace be with you," he says.

This is a conversation that could have gone so differently. Imagine yourself as Jesus in this situation. Here in one place are those who'd abandoned you in your hour of greatest need, scattering like sheep when soldiers appeared in the Garden of Olives. Peter, the only one who had stepped forward to defend you, shortly thereafter publicly denied knowing who you were. Not once, but three times. Now is your chance to speak a few choice words to these fair-weather followers. It is your chance to let them know how disappointed you are, how angry, how ashamed. Their betrayal has been like a knife through your heart.

But Jesus begins in a totally other chord: "Peace be with you," he says.

Note that this is not the same thing as sweeping everything under the rug and pretending that nothing had happened. It's not the same thing as jumping in with a bear hug and hearty laugh as if they could pick up the old relationship where they left off a month ago. Jesus' greeting is not judgment and it also is not warm fuzzies. It is the typical way that people greet one another in the Middle East: "Shalom" "As-Salam-u-Alaikum." As the Irish poet Padraig O'Tuoma notes, it is simply, "Hello." "Hello to you in this locked room."¹

"Hello" is the beginning of a new conversation.

The last two years in health care have been deeply divisive ones. In the midst of an ever-evolving pandemic we have had to figure out what PPE should look like and how it

¹ Padraig O'Tuoma. *In the Shelter: Finding a Home in the World*. (Hodder & Stoughton, 2015), ch. 1

should be allocated. We've had to navigate staffing shortages and new pay structures. We've dealt with vaccine exemption requests and delayed surgeries and the need for diversion because all our beds are full. We've lost beloved co-workers who couldn't take it anymore and left. Even more tragically, we've lost colleagues who have died.

We know exactly what it is like to feel locked together in a space full of fear, suspicion, and anger — each sure that part of the reason we are in this situation is because of the actions and stances of the others in the same building. And into this space, can you imagine Jesus entering with neither judgment nor naivete, simply saying, “Hello... Peace”? In the Gospel of John, it says that he then showed those gathered the wounds in his hands and side, and so imagine that he also does this in his conversation with you and your co-workers — not because he needs to be sent to the ED for immediate attention, but because these wounds *just are*. They still exist. They have not disappeared in his resurrection. And then he says again, “Hello ... Peace.”

Where do you imagine the conversation would go from here? In the Gospel of John, Jesus begins to speak about forgiveness – which again is not the same as sweeping things under the rug, but rather, it is about not allowing the past wounds to continue to keep hurting us each time we think about them. Forgiveness is about letting the past be past and the present be present, and starting a new conversation with a “hello.”

Perhaps in your own situation it feels too soon to speak of such a thing. Maybe it is. But today, in your Easter journey, imagine yourself drawing up alongside those gathered in the room that first Easter night, and ask for new insight as to how you can be part of beginning the conversation anew in your own setting. Who could you go to and say, “Hello”?