

Date Preached	24-Apr-2022	Date Initiated	12-Apr-2022
Where Preached	SAK	Appointed Readings	Easter 2, Yr C

" 'Peace be with you.' "



I think I've said in past sermons ... and I know I've told some of you in one-on-one conversations ... that there is fairly little from my corporate career that I miss. While I enjoyed most of my twenty-five years as an in-house lawyer¹—both the successes and the challenges, I knew God had other plans for my life, and once I (finally!) discerned God's call, I've really never looked back.

The one thing I do *occasionally* miss—and this might surprise some of you—is the traveling. Now, I was never one of those corporate road warriors: the people who are on the road five nights-a-week, every week ... who basically live out of a suitcase. But I did travel a lot, at first domestically but then mostly internationally, and I really enjoyed it. Seeing new and different parts of the world ... finally meeting people who previously had been only a voice on a telephone² ... getting acquainted with their cultures, their foods and their ways of thinking.

But on just about every trip I can remember, there'd come a point when I just wanted to *get home*. With anticipation, I'd start playing the 'tape' of what that would look like, in my head: I'd walk in the front door, kiss Jim, give the dog a long belly rub and bask in just *being* with them, again. The first hour or so after arriving home wasn't the time to tell Jim everything I'd seen or done ... or recount whatever airline mishaps or hotel horrors I'd encountered. There'd be time for all of that, later. What I really looked forward to was just *getting home*: putting down my bags and resuming the *life* I loved ... with the *ones* I loved.

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In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus has been away a while, too. After traveling throughout Judea with Him as His constant companions for some three years, the disciples haven't seen Him for three days—three whole, harrowing days since He died on a cross like a criminal. Worse, when two of them had gone to visit His Tomb earlier this day, they'd found it empty. Yes, Mary Magdalene has reported that He's risen—alleluia!—but will Jesus ever *come home* to them again? The disciples must be in a hell not unlike that of a spouse pacing the house after learning that the plane's been reported missing.

And then, all of the sudden, in walks Jesus! Now, in St Matthew's account of Jesus' reappearance, some of the disciples doubt He really *is* Jesus, and He must reaffirm His divine identity—"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," He tells them (Mt 28:17-20). And in St Luke's telling, the disciples refuse to believe: They think Jesus is a ghost! Jesus has to launch into a long discourse, going all the way back to Moses in Egypt, to convince them He really *is* the risen Christ: the blissful peace of arriving home after a journey ↓ marred by immediately being

¹ Full disclosure: Technically, the first six years of my practice were at a law firm, but I spent a great deal of my time working for the client who would eventually hire me.

² Once upon a time, there was a pre-Zoom world. Do you remember it? Video conferencing *slowly* became part of my company's life toward the end of my tenure, but it could never fully replace an in-person conversation.

asked to pull out your phone and show pictures of every place you've been and recount every sight you saw.³

But it was St John's account of Jesus' reunion with His disciples, which we just heard, that got me thinking about my *own* homecomings. He walks in this door, sets down His suitcase and quietly gives His mates the warmest, sweetest greeting He knows: "*Peace* be with you." Aside from today's lesson, the word "peace" appears only two other times in all of John's Gospel, and both times it is spoken by Jesus to His disciples, in the Upper Room: "*Peace* I leave with you; my *peace* I give to you" (14:27); and "I have spoken these things to you so that, in Me, you may have *peace*" (16:33). "Peace" is a love-word ... an affectionate endearment ... a caring, esteeming, sustaining prayer ... that Jesus has bestowed upon His disciples. And when, at last, He returns to them, His first—and *only*—words are akin to "honey" or "darling" or "beloved": "Peace be with you." No long explanations of where He's been, or why. No history lessons or grand pronouncements to convince them Who He is or why they should believe in Him. "Peace" is all He needs to say, because, like "sweetheart" or "sunshine" or "hugger-bugger," it says all the love Jesus has for them; it says how deeply happy ... how overjoyed ... He is to have returned home to them, once more.

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Today marks the conclusion of the Easter Feast: not the season of Eastertide, but of the eight holy days⁴ we set aside each year to celebrate the cosmic and glorious Resurrection of our personal and loving Savior. Last week, as we entered Easter fresh off the journey of Holy Week, we rightly contemplated the eternal ... the timeless ... the momentous ... the life-giving and life-changing ... aspects of this climax of the Christian year.

But today, refreshed by a week spent in the unalloyed joy of the Lord's Rising Again, we prepare to leave the Easter feast: to turn from pondering the Empty Tomb and toward contemplating all its meaning and implications for us. And as we turn—as we *return*—how sweet it is to hear Jesus say, "Peace be with you. ... I love you. ... It is *so good* to see you again." For this is the quiet, calm, intimate message of Easter that we can carry with us every day of our lives: Jesus on the doorstep ... in the foyer ... in the kitchen ... in the bedroom ... setting down His bags, holding our His arms and saying, "I'm so glad to be back *home*, with you; and I'll never leave again."



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³ In the version of the conclusion of St Mark's Gospel that is most widely accepted by biblical scholars, Jesus does not reappear after the Resurrection. (See Mark 16:1-8.) There is a certain theology in this that will have to await another sermon!

⁴ The Feast of the Resurrection is the only one in our liturgical calendar that still has an "octave"—an ancient Church custom (dating back to the time of Constantine, in fact) of celebrating important feasts not just for one day, but for a day plus a whole *week* of days thereafter.