

Jesus says it in Greek, but he means it in Hebrew.

When Jesus greets his anxious disciples with *Peace be with you*, the peace he is imparting to them by his powerful speech is the Hebrew word *shalom*, which isn't so much a peace as it is the whole pie.

Among the many rich, textured meanings of *shalom* is wholeness, completeness, the state of everything being in full and fabulous harmony, all things being together and right with one another.

It is more than a mere absence of conflict; it is the presence of love, which of course is the sudden change in that locked room.

Now love is standing there, despite the closed doors, with his wounded hands open to give, to bless.

Shalom be with you, he says, to an incomplete group of fearful followers, huddling in worry and the confusion of a thousand wild feelings fractured into a million fragments of thought.

Shalom be with you, he says, even after they recognize and rejoice to see him, because even looking him in the face and seeing the smile of God isn't enough to pull them totally together after the weekend they've all had.

It is going to take more than one blessing to pick up all the pieces and transform them into peace. So Jesus speaks it twice, then gives them the very power of God--the power named Holy Spirit, the power of life, the power to forgive, to power to unlock the doors and move from gathering to going--and even after all of that, he's going to have to say it again.

Thomas wasn't with them.

Therefore, they weren't yet whole.

Shalom be with you means, in part, that Thomas be with you too.

Problem was, when they told Thomas that they had seen the Lord, he didn't believe them.

Pastor Brian Stoffregen suggests that this disbelief on Thomas' part creates something of a crisis a trust in the community of the disciples:

What if each time the disciples came together--which I think would have been at least daily during the intervening week, they try to convince Thomas about what they have seen.

*The imperfect [verb tense] = continued action in the past, is used in verse 25 -- "The other disciples **kept telling** him, 'We have seen the Lord.'*

Thomas refused to believe them.

It wasn't just God's word he wasn't believing, but the word and experience of his friends. How do they keep a harmonious, peaceful relationship with a non-trusting friend?

That requires strength beyond human willpower, which of course now the disciples have.

The disciples now have the Holy Spirit, the power to forgive, the power of God, which is the power to love those who do not love you in return, the power to welcome and bless those who do not trust you, the power God so graciously exercises with the likes of us.

This is the power to bestow *shalom*, the power to make things right and to make people and communities whole.

Thomas is with them the next Sunday when Jesus appears again and says it again.

Shalom be with you, and now, with Thomas present and the community complete, it is even more true than it was the week before.

And it is true not only the roll-call, attendance chart sense of a star in every square, "the gang's all here."

It is true in a deeper sense, because now, the doubter is in the house.

The guy who asks the uncomfortable questions and is not easily swayed finds room in the community of belief.

The problem child in the family has a place in the home; the struggling co-worker is included; the one who bears the mantle of the community's trust issues is present.

The one who was missing has been found, and welcomed, and the Lord has a particular, personal word for him.

That word is an invitation to touch the wounds, to finger the scars.

Life and death and community and salvation are full of pain and pockmarks, blood and tears and ugliness.

There is not only doubt in the life of God and humanity but also bloodshed, on both sides, which of course is the side that Jesus occupies, the One who bridges heaven and humanity, who brings all things together, who fashions *shalom*.

Therefore, there is room in this house for the whole story, and not just the happy, joyful parts.

There is room in this house of wholeness for questions, for doubts, for conflicts overcome by forgiveness, for second chances--not only for Thomas but also for Jesus--room for the scars of death and life, the marks of struggle and suffering, the stories that we shudder to tell but which re-shape all of us.

Shalom is wholeness that unapologetically includes the holes in our hands and feet and side and hearts and souls and memories and mindsets, wholeness so thorough and far-reaching that it embraces and welcomes all that is not whole among and within us, all that is broken and bruised and crumbling apart, like the body of Christ, given for you.

Which reminds us that *Shalom be with you* is deeper still.

That broken bread of Communion connects us now, today, far off in John's future, into one integrated whole with Thomas and the friends he had trouble trusting.

It connects us to those who have gone before us, the saints who have long since died and the saints whose disappearance have left holes in our hearts and scars so real and so raw we dare not let anyone touch them.

And *Shalom be with you* connects us to the future, too.

This gospel ends with a word of blessing that cascades down thousands of years from the ink in John's pen to the water in our font.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

Shalom be with all of you who have not had Thomas' opportunity to prod and poke the flesh of the risen Lord but instead have had to settle for the word of others, the word of John and Mom and Dad and grandmother and godfather.

Shalom be with you, William and Benjamin and Aidan and Andrew, you who will have to trust the word and witness of those who love you enough to bring you here today to be baptized and then keep bringing you back and keep telling you and keep forgiving and loving and blessing you even when you want no part of it.

Shalom be with you, so that your eternity and your right now are connected across time into one integrated whole, so that your baptismal *inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and*

unfading, kept in heaven for you, will inform and insure and inspire your life of various trials and triumphs here.

May your future someday and your faith now be so whole and so holy that they are held together as one seamless reality, and may peace invade your present and give you the power of God now, the power to forgive the past and to bless the future, the power to welcome others with patience and persistence the way that Jesus and his people welcomed Thomas then and welcome you now.

Andrew and Aidan, Benjamin and William, children of God, *Shalom be with you...receive the Holy Spirit.*

May that whole and holy power and peace guide you, bless you, protect, help, haunt and hold you, teach, inspire, lead and love you until that day when you also are finally gathered into that house with the others, and at last you see him too, your Lord and your God.