

Reading: John 20:19-31

It was great to see Boris Johnson the Prime Minister of Britain getting better from Covid 19 with the care of nurse Jenny from Invercargill. As it turns out this is not the first British Prime Minister to be cared for by a nurse called Jenny from New Zealand. Winston Churchill was as well. It hasn't been widely reported but Donald Trump had a near death experience too. He was walking around the garden of the White House and fell into one of the ponds. Nearby was a boy scout who was on a tour of the White House. He had just done his resuscitation badge and knew CPR. He rushed over and before the president's bodyguards could get to him he dragged the President out of the water and brought him back from drowning. When he came to, Donald Trump thanked the boy. "I am the leader of the free world," he said. "Name one thing I can do to thank you for saving my life." The boy looked at the President and said, "There is one thing you can do. Please don't tell my father what I have done."

Today we see not a resuscitated president but a resurrected Jesus. It is Sunday evening and the disciples are gathered together behind locked doors. But no mere locked doors can keep Jesus out. He comes and stands among them and greets them, "Peace be with you." What follows next is really interesting. He shows them his hands and his side. He was of course wounded in the side by the spear of the soldier at his crucifixion and his hands were pierced by the cruel nails as he hung on the cross. What an odd thing to do. It's odd on two levels. Wouldn't the resurrected body of Jesus be all shiny and new without wounds and secondly wouldn't he keep these wounds to himself. Our natural instinct is to hide our wounds, whether they are emotional or physical, but clearly it brings peace to the disciples to see Jesus' wounds. I wonder why?

St Paul describes the peace that Jesus offers as the peace of God that surpasses all human understanding.

I heard of one little old lady who felt her ministry was to always encourage the preacher with a word after the service. This particular Sunday the preacher was a visiting missionary, not the usually excellent vicar. The sermon was next level terrible. So, what to do? She had to think of something encouraging to say. Afterwards at morning tea she went up to the visiting preacher. You know she said your sermon today reminded me of the love of God and the peace of God. "Oh, that's great," said the preacher, "how did it do that?" "Well, it reminded me of the love of God because it was without end and the peace of God because it was beyond all human understanding."

Well the Gospel continues. Jesus is there again. His greeting is the same: "Peace be with you." And again, his wounds are on display but he takes it a step further with Thomas. He invites Thomas to actually put his hand into Jesus' wounded side and his fingers in the wounds of Jesus' hands.

I think John is presenting us with a profound truth that would be easy to miss. It is because of the wounds of Christ that we are healed and moreover, it's through accepting our woundedness that we find peace.

In this worldwide pandemic, we are not going to find peace by pretending that everything is alright and that everything will be alright. One of the people that died this week was a parishioner of one of the parishes in the archdeaconry. The vicar talked to me about the pain of not being able to minister to the family. She cannot visit them. She cannot organise a funeral for them. That is not okay. It's painful. But when we honestly face the current woundedness of our community and our world we can begin to experience Christ's peace in a new way.

The Hebrew word for peace, Shalom, explains it better. Shalom is wholeness, shalom is justice, shalom is love. Finding peace or Shalom at this time of the COVID crisis involves valuing those we normally take for granted. There has been a totally justified outpouring of gratitude for our healthcare workers who put their own lives on the line for others. But it also includes the lowest paid: the cleaners, the supermarket workers, the rubbish collectors, rest home carers and midwives. These are not just essential workers but vital workers. Even the politicians and bureaucrats that we love to hate, even these people have a vital role at this time. You see with the help of Jesus we have stumbled onto a great truth, that peace is to be found in embracing our woundedness, admitting our shortcomings and being honest about our weaknesses.

Kathryn Butler is a trauma and critical care surgeon who left work to home-school her children. Of all people, she knew what she was going through. It was called depression. She writes about how she found peace.

When I awkwardly stepped into that church building more than a decade ago, those present couldn't discern my agony. But they saw me. They beheld me as another image-bearer of God, worthy of love, won by Christ. They offered table fellowship. They opened their homes and their lives to a stranger. They shared books, baked pies, and offered unconditional embraces. They inquired. They listened. When I finally had the courage to admit to them my depression, they loved me even more. The table fellowship continued. The books still exchanged hands. The embraces just lingered a bit longer. The house visits increased in frequency. The prayers became more pointed, more fervent. They didn't reprimand me or offer advice. They simply partnered with me, holding on to me while the waves of grief ebbed and flowed.

Their efforts didn't chase away the darkness. They didn't cure my depression or jolt my mind awake with a burst of hope. But they *did* reflect Christ's love and in so doing, buoyed me through turbulent seas. They reminded me, even while I was steeped in hopelessness and shame, even when I couldn't believe their words, that Christ lived and died and rose for me. And like a shaft of light glittering through inky waters, that truth—that love—penetrated through.

Like a shaft of light that love penetrates through. I can't say what wounds you bear but I do know this. I know that together as we face Covid-19 the Risen Christ offers us something that no one else can, a deep peace. The peace of our need and the peace of our longing.