

Easter 3—Year B
Acts 3:12-19
Psalm 4
I John 3:1-7
Luke 24:36b-48

Jesus himself stood among the disciples and said to them, “Peace be with you.” We keep on hearing Jesus say these words; we keep hearing him extend this *peace* to his disciples. We hear about this *peace*, and we picture *calm, equanimity, a lack of anxiety, serenity*, but the *peace* that Jesus extends is a *bigger peace*. In the Greek, it is a *state of national tranquility*, a space that is *exempt from the rage and havoc of war*; it’s *not just peace within my own individual soul*, but it’s *peace between individuals, harmony and concord between people*; it’s the *security and safety and prosperity and felicity (happiness)* that come because *peace and harmony make and keep things safe and prosperous*.

No wonder **the disciples are startled and terrified**. Maybe *it wasn’t just the fact* that they thought they were seeing a ghost, but maybe their being startled and terrified is *connected to the fact* that they *could not conceive* of such a *peace* as Jesus was extending. They had just witnessed an innocent man be executed by the state. *A man* who, yes, was *guilty of many things—a man* who had certainly *broken some rules*; *a man* who had called out *systems that laid heavy burdens* disproportionately on some and enriched others; *a man* who wasn’t afraid to *question authority* when that authority was being abused; *a man* who had created chaos when, in protest, he *turned over the tables in the Temple* to show how bankrupt the system was; *a man* whose trial was a sham with its false witnesses; *a man* who was their friend, their brother, her son; *a man* who was full of love and life and still so young who dared to live in the fullness of the dignity and power and love that he possessed. *He was perceived as a threat, and they killed him for it*.

Yes, his disciples were startled and terrified for they *could not conceive* of Jesus on *the other side* of the violent death they had witnessed, and they certainly *could not conceive* of the *peace* of which he speaks.

Maybe we can’t either. Not in a week when Daunte Wright, *another black young man*, was shot and killed by police in what started as a *routine traffic stop* for expired tags. While my heart races when I am pulled over in a traffic stop—yes, I have been pulled over a couple of times—it’s because I feel shame and like I’ve done something wrong; my heart has *never* raced once because I feared that that stop would result in the end of my life. I well imagine that such a *peace* as Jesus extends is unimaginable to African-Americans who feel terror when they are pulled over while driving.

Such a *peace* seems *unimaginable* as protests erupt and the Minneapolis community, and the whole country, is on edge awaiting the outcome of the Derek Chauvin trial.

Such a *peace* seems *unimaginable* in Chicago as that community reels from the death of Adam Toledo, a 13-year old Latino boy, a seventh grader who was still playing with Legos and Hotwheels and who was shot by police 20 seconds into a foot chase in the wee hours of March 29. The officer yelled to Adam to show him his hands, and as Adam turned around with his hands in the air, the officer shot him.

National tranquility, a space free of rage and havoc, harmony and concord between people, security and safety and prosperity and happiness made possible because peace and harmony keep things safe and prosperous—such a peace is inconceivable to us right now.

This week, **Charles M. Blow**, a regular contributor to the **New York Times** opinion page, wrote a piece entitled, ***“Rage Is the Only Language I Have Left.”*** Mr. Blow is an African-American male. His writing often unnerves me because it is so gut-wrenchingly honest, and this title alone drew me in because I need to hear what all of this feels like for people in black and brown bodies. At the end of this piece, he writes this:

So, it becomes hard to write about this in a newspaper because it is no longer new. The news of these killings is not that they are interruptions of the norm, but a manifestation of the norm.

There is no new angle. There is no new hot take. There is very little new to be revealed. These killings are not continuing to happen due to a lack of exposure, but in spite of it. Our systems of law enforcement, criminal justice and communal consciousness have adjusted themselves to a banal barbarism.

This has produced in me and many others an inextinguishable rage, a calcification of contempt. As for me, I no longer even attempt to manage or direct my rage. I simply sit with it, face it like an adversary staring across a campfire, waiting to see how I am moved to act, but not proscribing that action and definitely not allowing society’s idea of decorum to proscribe it.

A society that treats this much Black death at the hands of the state as collateral damage in a just war on crime has no decorum to project. That society is savage.

I am also no longer interested in talking about Black pain and Black trauma. (I am becoming ever more convinced that there is a prurient interest in gawking at Black suffering rather than a genuine desire to remedy it.) I now focus on my rage.

I’m sure that pain and trauma are present in me, but I’m choosing to subjugate their import. Rage has ascended to my position of primacy. America scoffed and was unmoved when, for years, we spoke out of our pain. So be it. Now, rage is the only language I have left.

For **Charles Blow**, and so many like him, they cannot *conceive* of the *peace* that **Jesus** extends.

Jesus said to them, **“Why are you frightened? Why are you so agitated and troubled; why are you so disquieted and restless and distressed? 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.”**

Oh Jesus, don’t you see, we have doubts in our hearts because our hearts are broken. We don’t know where to go with all of this violence, with all of this rage, with all of this fear, with all of this paralysis and resistance and lack of will to make these systems just. We are afraid that this endless loop where we just grow numb to these horrific events is our new normal. Our heads maybe be able to grasp other possibilities, but our hearts, our hearts, how do we speak to the hearts, ours and others, how do we move hearts because it is from the heart that words and actions truly rise?

“Look at my hands and my feet,” Jesus says, “Look at my wounds; I GET IT. I died at the hands of the state; I received all the violence and humiliation and dehumanization they could throw at a human being. I don’t just stand with those who suffer these things; I stand in that space myself, and I absorb it all into my being, and I still bear the scars of those wounds. But I am here. Touch and see—these words aren’t the final word; my life is.”

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?” It’s a puzzling statement the text makes, but basically, **the disciples are wrestling their way through a great disconnect**—they want to trust the Risen Life before them; they feel joy at the possibility, and yet, it is *so incongruent with their lived experience*, that it is hard for their hearts to take this leap of trust.

And in the middle of all of that, Jesus says such a human, human thing—“*Ya got anything to eat???*” Even as our *minds* are blown, by great tragedy OR by great possibility, even as our hearts keep breaking, even as our *spirits* are so weary, the *body* still matters. Even Jesus, even *resurrected* Jesus, got hungry and needed to be fed. It is a great reminder that, amidst all the work that our baptismal vows demand of us in our time, we have to tend to the very human rhythms and limits of our *bodies*. Stop and eat; stop and rest; stop and play. Thomas Merton once said, “*We must slow down to a human tempo and we’ll begin to have time to listen.*” It’s more important than we know. Merton also says this in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*:

“There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence to which the idealist most easily succumbs: activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of our activism neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.”

Our work for justice demands that we slow down and tend to our *bodies*, our *hearts*, our *minds*, and our *spirits*, or we will most definitely contribute to the violence we are seeking to transform.

Jesus then goes on to say this to his disciples, “I told you, everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he *opened* their minds to understand the scriptures. And this *opening* didn’t just allow them to see in a new way; it’s way more than that.

This *opening* is deep and thorough; it’s the same word to describe *opening* the womb with the birth of the first-child. This is about the capacity to birth new life as they go back and wrestle with the teachings of the law, the prophets, and the psalms anew. And for Jesus, *all of those teachings* come this focal point: “The Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. *You are witnesses of these things.*”

Suffering and injustice are real lived experiences, *even for the Messiah*, but they are not the end of the story—*rising from the dead is*. So, as we sit with all the violence and all the death:

Where do we see resurrection? How can we come alongside with our *minds* thoroughly *opened* and help midwife what is *rising*, what is *yearning* to be born in this world?

How do we claim all the responsibility and all the power that come with being witnesses to these things that we keep seeing, and how do we claim our voice to call on the nation to repent?

And how do we help our country reckon with our sins in a way that leads to forgiveness—*not a cheap, fast, and easy forgiveness*—but a forgiveness that is real and lasting because it has spoken the truth

about the **horror and pain** of the **generational sins committed** and then **backed those words with actions** that will **reshape systems to honor life for all people**?

How do we **begin in our Jerusalem, *the city where we live***, and **let our work move out from there**? How do we **join Jesus in being instruments of the *peace*** he has come to extend? To what do we need to **die *in order that* we may rise with Jesus** and **help usher in a new way of walking in this world, freely and without violence, for all of humanity**?

Jesus' *peace* may be *inconceivable* to us this day, but it is not *impossible*. As the angel said to Mary, *who definitely didn't feel up to the task*, **"For nothing will be impossible with God"** [Luke 1:37].

In a week when we might want to throw up our arms and just give up in despair, *in a week* when we are startled and terrified yet again, Jesus comes to show us his hands and his feet and to share a meal with us.

Just as he showed us how to die, he will show us how to rise from all of this death.

You are witnesses of these things. With God's help, dare to speak, dare to name, dare to challenge all the forces that "corrupt and destroy the creatures of God," and dare to proclaim the power of love and a relentless commitment to life. Dare *all of these things* beginning in your Jerusalem and don't stop until all the earth knows the *peace* that is more than we can *conceive* of today. Amen.

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