

How Jesus shares the peace: John 20:19-31

The disciples are afraid, so they lock their doors. I do the same.

by [Frank G. Honeycutt](#) in the [April 7, 2009](#) issue

I've always loved the story of the skeptical disciple who did not at first believe that Jesus was back from the dead. I suspect there's a bit of Thomas in us all.

It's Easter evening, after dark. The disciples are gathered behind locked doors because they are afraid. At our house, I check our doors every night after everyone's inside—main lock, dead bolt. When one of the kids comes in late and forgets to lock up, I scold that kid the next morning.

Jesus appears before the disciples this night in spite of the early security system. He says, "Peace be with you" and then does a rather odd thing (if you ask me) in absolute conjunction with sharing the peace: "He showed them his hands and his side." Look closely at the story and you'll notice there is not even a breath separating these comforting words of Jesus and the parading of his scars—his old wounds may be beginning to scab over a bit from the events of the preceding week. There is something important going on here that connects the peace of Christ with the wounds of Christ. Jesus stands among them, shows off his palms, hikes up his shirt and lets them take a gander at where the spear went in. "Peace be with you," he says, and then his wounds are immediately on display.

We've been "sharing the peace" in the Lutheran liturgy since at least 1978, when the *Lutheran Book of Worship* made its debut. Of course, the practice actually goes back to biblical times, but perhaps nothing has generated more controversy and resistance in liturgical reform among Lutherans than this ancient and very scriptural gesture in our worship order just before we celebrate Holy Communion.

What would happen if we took our cues from Jesus in sharing the peace? "Peace be with you, Madge, and take a look at my cardiac bypass incision." "Peace be with you, Randy, and let me tell you about my bills I had a hard time paying last month."

“Peace be with you, Sally, and I’m sure you’ve heard about my nephew who’s struggling with a drug problem.”

A week later the disciples are all together again—same house, same shut doors. I think it’s significant that Thomas is allowed to remain with the community in spite of his doubts. There doesn’t seem to be a hint of conversion coercion or pressure placed upon Thomas because he refused to believe the story they were telling him. He stayed with the community, roamed the fields and asked questions that whole week. I suspect nobody would have minded if he’d done that for a month, a year or even longer.

But it’s a week later. And again Jesus says those same words: “Peace be with you.” Again he offers his hands, hikes up his shirt. “Go ahead,” says Jesus. “Let your fingers do the walking.”

Please run from any Christian proclamation that sounds something like this: “This may be a sad life, brothers and sisters, but there’s a better day coming! Hang in there because Jesus will make it all right one day!” I honestly believe those promises, but no sermon should refuse to acknowledge the wounds that make us so guarded and fearful.

Thomas came to belief because the wounds were on display in that first community of believers. Our wounds are part of who we are.

In 1958 Lili Jacob was the winning contestant on the television show *Queen for a Day*. In a recent issue of the *New Yorker*, writer Alec Wilkinson reports that when asked what they wanted if selected as queen, most contestants asked for “a washer and dryer . . . or a vacation.”

Not Lili Jacob. “Jacob asked for 500 dollars to have a plastic surgeon remove the number A-10862 from her arm. It had been tattooed there at Auschwitz.” She was the winning contestant that day.

But even though Lili Jacob had that tattooed number removed, she would not, could never forget. We are a wounded people. Sometimes we pretend, even with those we know fairly well, that nothing’s wrong. It’s often considered bad form to confess our weaknesses, so when we’re asked we often say, “Fine, everything’s fine”—lying through our teeth. But on this first Easter evening, Jesus refuses to pretend. He refuses to pretend that nothing has happened.

Words alone fail to convince Thomas. Curiously, Thomas is called “the twin” in this passage. The other twin is never named. Perhaps there’s a side of us that is sibling to Thomas. We need an authentic look at our Lord’s wounds.

True peace—and perhaps true belief—are possible only when we deal seriously with the wounds of the body of Christ, the church. How shall we move beyond the locked doors where we hide so adeptly in fear?

“Peace be with you,” he said. And then he showed them his hands and his side.