

April 8, Easter 2B (John 20:19-31)

## **When Jesus walks into the locked room, the first thing he offers is peace.**

by [Diane Roth](#) in the [March 14, 2018](#) issue

A friend of mine relayed an experience from a trip to Europe with her husband. They were touring cathedrals in Spain. Their tour guides would take them around the cathedrals, reporting on the architecture and the art, the history and the culture of the area. Oftentimes there would be a mass in session during their tour. As a sidelight, their guides would also warn them to beware of thieves and to keep their purses close to them. So in the middle of a cathedral, my friend was startled when a woman came up to her and said some words, her hand outstretched. My friend remembered the warnings and shrank back, concerned. It was not until afterward that my friend recognized the woman's words: *La paz de Dios*. The peace of God. She was sharing the peace.

On this second Sunday of Easter, we hear the familiar story of Thomas. Every year we hear the same story, about how Thomas was absent and how the next week he was present but did not believe what the disciples told him. But for some reason the beginning of the story, that Easter evening appearance—I read right past it. Jesus walks right into their locked room, and the first words he says are, “Peace be with you.” He is sharing the peace.

Is this just a greeting, nothing to pay special attention to? Is it the equivalent of saying “good evening” or “have a nice day”? Or is it something more than that?

In my congregation, sharing the peace sometimes seems like a free-for-all, with people crossing the aisles and greeting old friends until I have to tell everyone to return to their seats for the next song. This has to be intimidating for some visitors, who may want to remain anonymous—or who may realize that people are sharing the peace but not with them.

At the cathedral in Spain, my friend recoiled in fear. She did not understand the woman's words. Was she an enemy or a friend? The disciples must feel the same way. After all, they aren't expecting a living Jesus to walk through those doors. They expect an enemy, someone who might come to arrest them too, someone who wishes them harm.

First they feel fear, then they understand—and what about after that? Do they experience some shame? After all, in the face of persecution, they did not behave like heroes. Peter denied that he even knew his friend. The disciples mostly ran away, and even now, with rumors of resurrection in the air, they are hiding.

And Jesus comes, and the first thing he offers them is peace. Not a peaceful evening by the fire, not even peace of mind, not the absence of conflict—peace. Peace be with you: it's peace as reconciliation, which I can't help thinking is really and truly rare. Whatever has separated us in the past no longer separates us—it's that kind of peace.

Why did Jesus rise from the dead? What does the resurrection mean, really? Does it mean life, eternal life? That's the first and easy answer. But maybe it's just as much about giving us peace, a peace that crosses boundaries, languages, fears, suspicion—whatever separates us. And so much separates us. I can't help thinking of all of the debates we are having about immigration, about who is worthy and who is not, about who we are afraid of and who fears us.

This fall, I traveled with a few other members of my congregation to Lima, Peru. We have a sister congregation there. We support the congregation and its ministry with children. Every year a woman from my congregation goes there, and sometimes she takes a few people along with her. So this year I went along. I suppose I wanted to put flesh on our mission, to meet them and know them, even a little.

There is so much that separates us. I remember sitting in a restaurant and trying to understand the news on the TV. I realized that there are important news stories happening all over the world, crises that I have no idea are happening. I remember being cautioned about the things and people we should watch out for. I sat next to children and felt sad that our language barrier prevented me from talking to them or asking them about their lives.

And then on Sunday morning we all piled into a little church for worship. I sat next to a little girl named Pamela, and we sang some songs together in Spanish. The pastor

invited me to help with communion, to say the words of institution in English. She would repeat them in Spanish. She let me hold the cup and say the words, "The blood of Christ, given for you." She let me practice the words in Spanish, and look into people's eyes while I said them. And it felt like life to me, like resurrection.

*La paz de Dios.* Nothing can separate us. Maybe they mean the same thing.