

According to the gospel of John, Jesus' first words out of the tomb were "Greetings!" As we said last week, the women came to the tomb to say goodbye. He was there, raised from the dead, to say hello. After his conversation with the women, Jesus' next recorded words were "Peace be with you," followed by "peace be with you." And, for good measure, He says it a third time – "peace be with you" - in our gospel reading for today.

Before His death and resurrection, Jesus told the disciples "Peace I give to you, but not as the world gives to you." And now, on the first Easter evening, as the disciples are huddled together in fear of the Jews, Jesus gives them peace.

I would imagine that they were not only afraid of the Jews, but afraid of Jesus too. The last time they were together was not a stellar performance for the disciples. They couldn't stay awake in the garden of Gethsemane while Jesus was in extreme anguish. They fled when he was arrested and deserted him while he was nailed to the cross. If the women's rumors about His being alive were true, what on earth would He say to them!!! I know what I would say to them and it would not be appropriate to include in a sermon! Well, what He says to them is "Peace be with you," – 3 times. What is the peace that Jesus gives, and how is it different than the world's version of peace?

By way of trying to answer those questions, I want to talk about a column in the New York Times written by a college student named Lauren Boyle. Lauren is clearly looking for peace. She begins "*Last May I was like a balloon without a string, in desperate need of some tie to the earth.*" That's a simple, but effective simile. Who hasn't felt that way – like a balloon without a string?

I remember feeling that way especially when I was a young adult. What was I supposed to do with my life, now that I was out of college? Christie and I were married, but fairly aimless, and usually promoting conflicting agendas. I wanted to live in a house with a manicured lawn and quite possibly a staff; she wanted to live in a commune without electricity. I wanted to go to law school; she wanted to go to a third world country. So, surprise, surprise – we relocated to Haiti, where there were, in fact, very few lawns.

Obviously, you don't have to be a young adult to feel like a balloon without a string, in desperate need of some tie to earth. A divorce will do the trick. Or the death of a spouse. Or the lack of a spouse. Or work problems. Sometimes, just some bad meatloaf or a harsh word, or a rainy Tuesday afternoon is enough to give you what Walker Percy describes as a sense of "dislocation." We need someone to say "Peace be with you," – at least 3 times, maybe even 3 times a minute.

The author of the column looks for peace through a usual route – romance. She dated a guy in high school who was kind and loving. She describes him as her "first real love," although they broke up before college. Since then she'd had a string of unsatisfying relationships with "*guys for whom the word girlfriend does not exist and whose idea of a*

proposal is sending a graphic late night text message.” Just before graduation, her grandmother has a catastrophic stroke and is on her deathbed. She comes home and reconnects with the old boyfriend who was planning on going to Roman Catholic seminary to be a priest. But, he confesses his love for her and his desire to get married and have children and start a life together. Sounds great, right?

Well, this is the turn in the article that shows us peace as the world gives and not as Jesus gives. And, as I hope we see, the peace that the world gives is no peace at all. Lauren, attending her dying grandmother, looks at her grandparents’ marriage and judges it as unfulfilling. She writes,

“They married at 18, hardly cognizant of their choices, she in a simple dress and gloves, he in his military uniform. 56 years after their wedding, my grandmother told me that she had married my grandfather because “he was a nice boy.’ Even at 14, I didn’t believe it was quite as simple as that.

Yet here I had my own ‘nice boy.’ He was the ‘I love you’ in a barrage of ‘come over; I’m drunk.’ He had considered dedicating his life to God; he was intelligent and loved children....I had asked the universe for someone like him.”

Here’s where Lauren balks, and here is why the NYT printed it. *“What my grandmother didn’t know on her wedding day was that her ‘nice boy’ would wage a battle with alcoholism that would strain their marriage and destroy his paychecks before he was able to summon the strength to quit. They would stay together another 36 years before he died, raising seven children in a happy crowded house.”* Lauren then rejects the “nice boy” and chooses what she calls “freedom”, apparently afraid of a marriage that involves some kind of suffering, or some tie to earth that requires sacrifice.

Now, what am I saying? I’m not saying that peace comes with marrying the nice boy, although the 2 billion of us that watched the royal wedding are hoping that peace may come from marrying a Prince. I’m not saying that Lauren should have gotten married or there is anything wrong with her wanting to go out into the world on our own. But what I am saying is that the world’s version of peace is usually along these lines: Go out and be free. Do what you want and live for yourself. Love yourself. Stay away from suffering; keep on the sunny side of life.

Well, this sounds like it would make sense. But, in actual fact, living for yourself brings emptiness, not fulfillment. It results in dislocation, not peace. Jesus is as explicit as you can get on this one: “whoever saves his own life will lose it.” I’m not even going to cite an example here, because you have example after example of this in your own life. The peace the world gives is no peace at all. I sure hope I’m wrong about Lauren, but I would guess her “freedom” will mean many more late night and lewd drunken texts. Where is the freedom, where is the peace in that? In any case, manicured lawn’s never give you a moment’s peace: there is always a weed threatening to take over.

Peace be with you, Jesus says to his disciples. What is the peace that Jesus gives? Well, we see that it immediately involves forgiveness. He doesn't even bring up the disciples disastrous failure! He just gives them peace. **The one who has just died to forgive the sins of the world** says, "If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven."

Then we see that His peace involves love of others. Jesus says, "*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*" The Father sent His Son into the world to give His life as a ransom for many; we are sent into the world in the same way. Peace always involves loving others – loving others always involves forgiving others – forgiving others always involves suffering and sacrifice. Even the sacrifice of loving a man through his alcoholism, a sacrifice which yielded in Lauren's own terms, "seven children in a happy crowded house."

The Bishop of London was exactly right in his Royal Wedding sermon on Friday. "*A spiritual life grows as love finds its centre beyond ourselves. Faithful and committed relationships offer a door into the mystery of spiritual life in which we discover this; the more we give of self, the richer we become in soul; the more we go beyond ourselves in love, the more we become our true selves and our spiritual beauty is more fully revealed.*" Again, this is not just about marriage. It is about being sent in love and grace and forgiveness into the world. The Bishop was just saying the second part of Jesus insight: "whoever loses his life will save it."

Walker Percy's uncle – William Alexander Percy – wrote a hymn about the peace that God gives not as the world gives. It is hymn 661 and speaks directly to the peace that delivers us from self and sends us out to lay down our lives for the world. Writing about the very disciples to whom Jesus says "Peace be with you," Percy begins, *Contented, peaceful fisherman before they ever knew, the peace of God that filled their hearts brimful, and broke them too.*

Young John who trimmed the flapping sail, homeless in Patmos died, Peter who hauled the teeming net, head down was crucified.

The peace of God it is no peace, but strife closed in the sod. Yet let us pray for but one thing – the marvelous peace of God."

God will love you and forgive you and give you grace no matter what. Remember he says "Peace be with you" to his disciples right up front, before they forgive anyone or are sent anywhere. That is the nature of God, who is the "*author of peace and lover of concord, and in whose service is perfect freedom.*" Amen.