

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Peace be with you. *[And also with you.]*

Oh, you thought you were going to escape a sermon, but here it comes.

I have just spent a week on retreat, part retreat and part pilgrimage, in the Navajo Nation in Northeastern Arizona, Northwestern New Mexico, and Utah. I went with several other women bishops as guests of the Episcopal Church in Navajo land. If you haven't been to this starkly, astonishingly beautiful part of the country, you should go, especially if you have Navajo hosts to welcome you. They're people happy to greet and welcome friends.

The Navajo language is famously difficult leading to well-known stories about the Navajo code talkers whose code based on the Navajo language known to so few people was unbreakable during World War II. But I did manage to learn two Navajo words while I was there. I'll try to pronounce them correctly. The first one is "Yá'át'ééh" and it means literally "it is good", but it's used as a greeting always with a handshake to convey the goodness and the wellness of greeting a stranger with open heart and open hands.

The second word I learned was "hozho". This is the word in Navajo for peace, but it's peace in a broader sense than we often mean it when we use it in English. In English, we can sometimes use peace to mean something as narrow as a cessation of hostilities in a war, but in Navajo, like the languages that the Bible was written in, Hebrew and Greek, peace or "hozho" or shalom has a much broader meaning. It means a well-being that encompasses the world that brings justice and rightness and wholeness. For Navajo Christians, faith should lead to this kind of peace or wholeness that brings harmony and beauty to the whole world.

It is in this sense of peace that the resurrected Jesus greets the disciples with open hands and these words, peace be with you. He offers them

God's shalom, God's "hozho" or wholeness that comes with the resurrection, which brings a whole new reality into being and he offers open, wounded hands as a tangible sign of what has happened.

Those familiar hands that healed and blessed are also evidence of Jesus' death, carrying the wounds of his terrifying crucifixion. But here he is in the midst of his friends and through the disciples fear, he brings peace so that they are transformed over the course of this Gospel story that we hear today from terror to wonder, a new understanding of this new reality of resurrection.

Luke, our Gospel writer, is very careful to make sure that we understand that the resurrection of Jesus is outside all categories that we are accustomed to in this world. Of course, we understand the category of living people and Jesus does not fit into this category because he has died. The scriptures are emphatic about this. His death on the cross was not a fake. He was dead and laid in the tomb and many people saw it happen.

We understand the category of dead people, but Jesus doesn't fit here either. Dead people don't get up and walk. Ancient Jews knew this well. Modern people sometimes think that the disciples must have been simple country bumpkins who didn't know about death, and that's why they could make up this crazy story about resurrection. But let's be clear, they were far more familiar with death than we are. They lived with it every day. Their children died young. Their wives and sisters and mothers died in childbirth. Their elderly parents lived and died in the same house with them. They watched people die public deaths on crosses. They didn't have sterile hospital rooms and beautifully appointed mortuaries that mask the reality of death. When someone died, the whole family was there with them. They knew far more, more personally about death, than we do. These people understand the category of dead people and Jesus doesn't fit.

Now we even understand the category of ghosts, whether we believe in them or not. We understand what this is, spirits of people who have died who

somehow linger and sometimes communicate with the living world. But Luke is very clear that Jesus is not a ghost, not a disembodied spirit, the soul of Jesus living on after his body has died. You can't touch a ghost. A ghost doesn't eat broiled fish. Jesus is not a ghost. And Jesus is not a memory, a realization that even after death, life goes on and that Jesus's kind words will live on even if his body doesn't. This is not that category either. Jesus does not fit any of our known categories: living, dead, ghost, memory. Jesus is something neither the disciples nor we have ever seen. Jesus is something new. He is transformed. He is resurrected, which shatters all of our known categories.

It is a phenomenon that establishes a whole new order of being, which Paul, at a loss for words, calls a spiritual body, which has to open new possibilities for each of us, which brings a new kind of peace and shalom, wholeness, "hozhō", that passes understanding. In the resurrection of Jesus, God is doing something new, something unexpected. God is establishing a whole new category, a spiritual resurrected body.

Luke wants to be absolutely certain that we understand that the resurrected body of Jesus is completely continuous with Jesus's life on earth. And yet this resurrected Jesus is a whole new order of creation. He's a spiritual body that somehow describes what God intends for all of us to become in our eternal life in God's presence. We don't need to fear death. What Jesus was in the resurrection is what we will become.

As we witness Jesus's resurrection, as we receive his peace, we too, like the disciples, are being transformed. Eventually, we will be transformed into spiritual resurrected bodies whenever God's time for that comes. For here and now, we are transformed into witnesses to the resurrection.

Now, when we think of Jesus's resurrection, our temptation is to spiritualize it like the disciples who thought that Jesus was a ghost, to say, "see, the life of the Spirit is more important than the life of the body." We think that Christianity means life after death and that that's what really counts. It does count and it is true, but that might lead us to be

tempted to think that the conditions of this world don't matter, that God intends to rescue us all from this earth anyway, and so it's all right that people live in poverty, that people are hungry, that people suffer, that the earth itself suffers. Yet, if we are tempted to think that Jesus cares only about so-called spiritual things, things like prayer and meditation and life after death, well Jesus calls us right back to physical reality, the reality that you and I live in, the touchable, visible, embodied reality of everyday life, with these words: "Look at my hands and my feet. Touch me and see." Because if nothing else is clear from our scriptures, what must be clear is that God is involved in our world, in its messiness, it's physicalness, in the everyday reality of things that we can touch and see and feel. God becomes known to us. God comes to us in our physical world. Which is why the things that we do in church are really very simple and basic. Jesus calls us to be baptized in the ordinary element of water. Jesus feeds us with common everyday foods, bread and wine, which are signs of his real physical embodied presence with us.

God speaks to us through our senses, the things that we can see and touch. That's why God resurrected Jesus and put him right back in this world where the disciples could see and touch him. As Theologian Stephen Cooper says, to insist on the reality of the resurrected body is to demand that we accept our present reality as a place where transformations of ultimate significance take place.

Here and now is where God comes to us, and here and now is where God calls us to be transformed, like the disciples, from fear to wonder, to witnesses of Jesus's resurrection, witnesses in a way that makes the resurrection an observable, tangible reality in this world. That I believe is the mission of the church, to bring transformation.

We live in a divided angry world, a world in which the Christian faith, when it makes news, is often associated with hurtful, judgmental, exclusionary attitudes. A world in which peace, shalom, wholeness, "hozhō" seems very far away from our present reality. That means it's up to us in the

church to help people have a true experience of the risen Jesus and to seek out that experience for ourselves, to see Jesus as the disciples did, to be transformed in his presence, into his witnesses, to offer his peace to the world. That is the mission of the church.

Several of our congregations in this diocese have been to the College for Congregational Development, and that training program for lay and clergy leaders expresses this concept of the mission of the church in its foundational model called "gather, transform, send". That is the mission of any congregation, it says, we gather people in church communities, we show them the light of Christ, which transforms them, and we send them forth to be salt and light and leaven for the world.

Of course, we talk a lot in church about the gathering part. How do we worship? How many people are in worship? How can we invite more people into worship? And we talk a good bit about the sending part. What should the church be doing in the world, feeding the hungry, advocating for justice, serving the poor? But it's the part in the middle that we often take for granted.

Transformation. How are we transforming the hearts and minds of people so that they can see Jesus, have a personal encounter with a Jesus who makes a difference in the world like the disciples did? How are we ourselves being transformed? How are we forming and being formed as disciples to send forth into the world?

That transformation happens in worship. It happens in beautiful music, worshipful liturgy, times of silence, meditation, and prayer. It happens in Bible study and children's programs and events that bring people together in community. And transformation happens in other ways too. Transformation happens when we relate to each other in the church differently than our world has taught us to. It happens when we address conflict and disagreement with respectful caring for the wellbeing of the person right in front of us. It happens when we embrace people who are

different from ourselves and demonstrate that we are willing to change and learn from them.

It happens when we look at our siblings inside and outside the church and see the image of God there, human beings with dignity and worth whom God loves. That's when we through the work of the church have our own personal encounters with Jesus. That's when we experience shalom, wholeness, "hozho", the peace of Christ.

So seek out transformation. Seek out ways to encounter Christ's resurrected body in the church. You are fortunate to belong to a church that offers many opportunities for transformation, from worship to classes, to ways to serve others. So seek out ways to encounter Christ, and as you encounter him, open your minds to his peace, his shalom, his "hozho", and then share that peace with others as witnesses to the resurrection of Christ.

Amen.