

“See—I am making all things new!” Those words from the closing book of the bible, the Revelation to John (and to us as we read it this morning), make me realize what a joy it is to be back with you today. It may seem like yesterday to you, but not to me. To be back here this morning is like singing the Easter hymn, “Welcome, Happy Morning!”

Where has all the time gone? I went from preaching on Prayer the second Sunday of Lent to slipping and falling that night, until finally returning today, eight weeks later -- just a week until the season of Easter is over next Sunday.

Words cannot express all my appreciation to Cindy, Don Mullins, and others too numerous to mention, who sustained the momentum of a wonderful Lenten program on prayer. Cindy has not only been pressed to preach every Sunday for these many weeks, but to keep all our ministries going and growing, supporting and being supported by a host of volunteers. And all this during a time when she has been challenged yet again with a major health issue and medical treatment.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation for all the cards, gifts, visits and phone calls during this rehabilitation time. At a time when my world seemed to be turned upside down, all of those expressions of concern and kindness meant so much. I was especially touched by the cards prepared by the St. James' Childrens' School students. (I wanted you to see two of these very special get-well wishes –I don't know if that's my picture on the

front. . . .) My medical surgery repaired my broken hip. But that surgery could not heal my broken spirit, which has been supported and healed by the loving good wishes of all of you here. I know now what it is to be on the receiving end of the healing ministries of St. James.

I now join the many other witnesses to this ministry, many of whom are right around you in the pews this morning. I realize now, more than I ever have before, what a parish community can be for each of us and for all of us. I am humbled to know that I am part of this loving community, and the opportunity each of us has to share the good news of that experience with others. I will never be able to thank you enough.

At times like this, we know that we have options about how we will respond to what has happened to us. We can just break down into the “Why Me?” mode of complaint and break out in anger that the world has treated us so unfairly, which leads us down a self-destructive blind alley --- OR we can break through to something new: a fresh discovery of a healing resource that transcends the attitudes that work against us.

That resource is Shalom — God’s peace. The word appears more than 250 times in the Bible, and its richness is shown in its many usages. On the Sunday after Easter, the risen Christ greets the discouraged and fearful disciples huddling together in an upper room with the greeting of “Shalom” assuring them of his presence. And in Jesus’ “farewell discourses” that will end the Easter Gospel

readings next Sunday, Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” Or, as another translation from the “Living Bible” expresses it in a paraphrase that has been very comforting to me, “I am leaving you with a gift — peace of mind and heart! And the peace I give isn’t fragile like the world gives. So don’t be troubled or afraid.” St. Paul would sum it up by writing “**He is our Peace.**”

Peace in the biblical sense is a verb that implies action—not just a state of being. It doesn’t come from artificially separating our physical lives from our spiritual lives. I think that everyone knows from experience that “peace of mind” can’t be found by pretending to escape the difficulties of life. Rather it is—when we are able to find it—in the midst of coping with the frustrations, difficulties, and tragedies in the journey of life.

Each of us should recognize and be grateful for the peace that we find in our daily lives – whether it is the deep, satisfying, spiritual peace that can come from introspection, meditation, and prayer to the brief moments of calm and quiet that we sometimes discover as we go through the day. Thanks to a friend who sprayed WD-40 on the annoyingly squeaky wheels of my walker, for example, I am very grateful to be able to walk in peace!

My experience is what it is, but it shouldn’t be dramatized too much. What can we say to the family whose newborn child faces immediate challenges just to live? What do we say about personal

and spiritual peace to the parents and grandparents, wives and children, of those lost in the terrible mine explosion in West Virginia? Can we carry the ministry and message of hope and caring into the tension and frustrations that divorced parents bring to the St. James' Child Transfer Center? Can the spirit of Jesus' peace and Shalom fill the hearts and hands of a nation and people in Haiti whose lives have *really* been turned upside down?

In all the challenges of different circumstances, we are called to be alert to authentic ways that will truly meet our deep need for peace of mind and spirit. The focus of Jesus' farewell message to his disciples is that he will **never leave them!** How can that be true? He says that within each one of us, Jesus is present as the Holy Spirit. He does not diminish personality, needs or desires, but **enriches** them. That is what he means when he says, "I am GOING away, and I am COMING to you."

Anyone can say that they are committed to finding global and personal peace. But that commitment can dissolve into filmy political oratory or hortatory preaching. Hortatory preaching just exhorts people to feel better and do better. But the honest and lasting peace in our hearts with the full nature of God's Shalom, God's peace, can only be found in asking the right questions and real-life engagement with the challenges and opportunities of the events and encounters of everyday experience.

Peace can be found in times of our greatest discouragement and disgruntlement. I had that kind of discouragement when I had been drafted -- leaving a good job, going away from home,

winding up here in Washington, lost and disconnected. It was just that dramatic, until I discovered what I needed -- God's Shalom. I began to find that in a church community. Now, decades later, my church community has been a resource for a new discovery of that Shalom, that peace.

When that happens, then Peace is not just a noun. It is a verb - something you enter into one step at a time. And I've discovered that to be not just **my** will and determination, but the power of the Holy Spirit working in ways I cannot always understand that makes it possible to sustain it. The roots of the Hebrew word "Shalom" are the words for that completeness and wholeness.

Through the strength of the Holy Spirit in my prayers, I can sense a mood of wholeness and well-being in my heart, that I, and I'm sure each of you, need very much. This can be mine and yours as we make ourselves available to God's spirit flowing through our lives.

Yes, it is a real joy to be back: to come back to reading these Gospel passages with a fresh eye of discovering all over again the words of Revelation, "See, I am making all things new," especially as I read these words in the circumstances of my life right now. I have learned how comforting—and peaceful—it is to know and believe that the God we know in Jesus Christ has chosen to live with us—to be with us forever—to stay close to us, and never let us go! AMEN.