

**The Second Sunday of Easter – John 20:19-31
St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, Sedona Arizona**

*“ . . . and the doors of the house where the disciples had met
were locked for fear of the Judeans.”*

This may be the first time you have heard the translation of this passage as Judeans instead of Jews. You may recall when Bishop Jennifer Reddall visited St. Andrew’s last month that she commented on some of the problematic translations of John’s Gospel in reference to the leaders of that time and place, and spoke about our responsibility to our contemporary Jewish neighbors in avoiding anti-Semitic overtones when proclaiming and interpreting Scripture, especially in the reading of John’s Passion narrative on Good Friday.

The Episcopal Church has been wrestling with this issue for several years knowing that Jewish families commonly “remain hidden in their homes on Good Friday to avoid abuse and even death,”¹ and in recent years have experienced anti-Jewish violence “including deadly attacks at synagogues and other Jewish gathering places,”² such as the 2018 mass shooting at the Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh.

If you participated in our Good Friday service this year, you may have noticed that, with Bishop Reddall’s encouragement, we made some modifications to the liturgy that incorporated a different Epistle reading and Solemn Collects that “acknowledge and celebrate God’s ongoing covenant with the Jewish people.”³ These liturgical alternatives were offered recently by The Rev. Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, who was my church history professor during seminary. Since 2017,

¹ <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2021/03/29/church-faces-renewed-pressure-to-change-good-friday-liturgy-that-risks-fueling-anti-jewish-hatred/>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

St. Andrew's has offered an alternate version of the Good Friday Passion narrative from John's Gospel that were made by another colleague in the Diocese of California to redress potential translation issues that imply antisemitism. However, there are other parts of John's Gospel in which the New Revised Standard Version may sound problematic as we continue to strengthen positive relationships with our Jewish neighbors. In other bible translations, the term "the Jews" has been translated as "the Jewish leaders" or "the Judeans," thereby pointing toward "a regional distinction in contrast with Jesus, the Galilean,"⁴ and, according to my seminary professor, "likely conveyed cultural, social and linguistic markers beyond today's religious connotations."⁵

But why is this attentiveness to translation or terminology important for today's Gospel narrative now that Jesus has been resurrected? Would it have been just as appropriate to refer to those whom the disciples feared as "the authorities?" I would argue that since John did not identify the persons to be feared as Jewish religious leaders, and he did not even mention the Roman occupiers, such as generalized term may be inaccurate. Apparently, there remains some ambiguity about to whom John was referring. Those who gathered in the angry crowds were not all Jews, but many of Jesus' followers were Jewish, and Jesus himself was a Jew. Perhaps John was overly generalizing as we sometimes do in our own culture when identifying groups of people using political, religious, gender, or racial labels.

As we know all too well, stereotyping emboldens divisiveness and bigotry, and can lead to the adoption of hateful epithets, and physical acts of violence. Such thoughts, words, and deeds are diametrically opposed to the teachings of Jesus

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

during his ministry, and in his message to the disciples during his post-resurrection appearances. On the evening of the day when Mary Magdalene told the others about the empty tomb, the crucified and risen Jesus appeared to the disciples offering words of peace and forgiveness. He did not arrive bashing in the locked door and chastising the disciples for betraying and deserting him in his darkest hour. But rather, Jesus appeared without force or fanfare, and blessed his disciples by saying, “Peace be with you.” Peace, as in *Shalom*, the Hebrew greeting that conveys not only peace, but harmony, wellbeing, and wholeness.

Walter Brueggemann writes that, “*Shalom* is the substance of the biblical vision of one community embracing all creation. . . The vision of wholeness, which is the supreme will of the biblical God is the outgrowth of a covenant of shalom . . . in which persons are bound not only to God but to one another in a caring, sharing, rejoicing community with none to make them afraid.”⁶ Jesus comes to offer the disciples *Shalom* amidst their great sense of overwhelming fear.

The disciples are naturally fearful and anxious about many things. They are locked up inside of the house because so many horrible and inexplicable acts have occurred over the past few days. Some of the people, who just a few weeks ago waved palms to greet Jesus as he entered Jerusalem on a donkey, had become convinced that Jesus needed to be arrested, tortured, and crucified. Many in the crowd may have been manipulated by jealous religious leaders to release Barabbas, but even Jesus’ followers did nothing to stop his crucifixion. And then on Easter morning, after Mary Magdalene told Simon Peter and the other disciple about the open tomb, they ran to go see for themselves and then, seemingly mystified,

⁶ Andrew Francis. *Shalom - The Jesus Manifesto: Radical Theology for Our Times*. Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster (2016), Chapter 1.

returned home. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. When she peered inside, she was greeted by two angels. After she told them that she feared that someone had taken away the body of her Lord, she turned to leave only to be greeted by a man she mistook to be the gardener. But when Jesus called her by name, Mary suddenly recognized him as her teacher; her rabbi.

Although Mary Magdalene, and a few other women, including his mother, had been faithful in staying with Jesus in his final hours, none of the others, except the beloved disciple were noted as standing at the foot of his cross. Apparently the others were hiding out of fear that they may be hunted down and suffer the same fate as their rabbi. News would surely spread like wildfire that his body was no longer in the tomb. The disciples might even be accused of stealing the body and hiding it so that they could tell others that Jesus had been resurrected. But once Mary Magdalene had announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” their fear and anxiety only intensified. If what Mary Magdalene had told them was the truth, then Jesus had been resurrected, and he wanted them to know that he was going to ascend to the Father. Surely the disciples who had betrayed and deserted Jesus were feeling a sense of shame and embarrassment, and were perhaps wondering if their behavior would impact their future relationship with Jesus. But just when they were wondering when they might have an opportunity to ask for his forgiveness, Jesus showed up and offered them greetings of Peace. He didn’t even mention their past unfaithfulness. Jesus just appeared and offered the kind of peace that only he can give; the peace that passes all reason and understanding. Peace that conveys forgiveness, and reconciliation, and unconditional love. Jesus didn’t even skip a beat in commissioning the disciples to carry on his ministry by breathing the Holy Spirit on them. The Holy Spirit that breathes all life into

existence. The Holy Spirit that empowers, guides, and sustains us to share God's love in the world. God's love that reconciles our lives with one another and with God through the gifts of forgiveness and reconciliation. In meeting the disciples where they were Jesus offered those struggling with doubt and faith a fresh start. There was no need to drag past brokenness into the future. There was simply an offer to restore relationships as God intends; to forgive the sins of others as they are forgiven them. And that included Thomas, even though he was not there when Jesus first appeared in the house.

We can speculate about where Thomas was on that first evening, but there is no doubt that Jesus loved Thomas so much that he came back to greet him personally. Jesus knew exactly what Thomas needed to believe, so he showed him the painful wounds that were still open, and those that were beginning to heal. Jesus wanted Thomas to know that he was loved as much as the others. And while Thomas could have exclaimed like the others, "I have seen the Lord!" he was the first to proclaim Jesus as his Lord and God.

Through the remainder of this Easter season, we will proclaim, "Alleluia! Christ is Risen," but in what ways will we proclaim "My Lord and my God"? In what ways will we recognize the risen Jesus appearing in our relationships? How might we bring healing to what is wounded and wholeness to what is broken? Jesus' greetings of Peace and acts of forgiveness and reconciliation are examples of how we may carry forward his ministry in the world. Embodying *Shalom* in our shared lives regardless of political persuasion, gender identity, racial or ethnic background, or religious affiliation, including those who profess none. Jesus offers all of us blessings of *Shalom* in the context of forgiveness, and in the context of restored relationships.

It is God's blessing of *Shalom* that we are invited to embody in our lives, that our relationships and communities may be restored to healing and wholeness, and raised to newness of life.

Shalom, my friends. *Shalom*.

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