

[John 20:19-31](#)

This week, the actor [Paul Ritter died](#). Well-known for parts in various TV shows and movies, he was best known in our house as Martin Goodman, the eccentric Jewish father in the Channel 4 comedy Friday Night Dinner.

For those of you who don't know Friday Night Dinner, it's a show centred on a not particularly religious Jewish family. Each Friday night, the two twentysomething sons come home for dinner, marking the beginning of the Sabbath. The wife Jackie, played by the wonderful Tamsin Greig, cooks chicken, which Martin habitually refers to 'as nice bit of squirrel', followed by apple crumble, which he always calls 'crimble crumble'.

The two sons fight and bicker, but everything generally descends into chaos when their hapless neighbour Jim calls at the door with his dog Wilson.

Jim is well-meaning but chaotic. In his attempts to be nice to his Jewish neighbours, he tries to copy everything he sees, because he assumes it's all Jewish tradition. However, this includes the time at a meal when one of the boys puts salt in his brother's water and Jim assumes that's how Jews drink water. Most of all, he inserts the word 'Shalom' into the conversation at every opportunity.

In our Bible reading today, Jesus inserts plenty of Shalom. Three times, Jesus says 'Peace be with you' – twice during his first visit to the disciples, and once on the second appearance. It's more than a pleasantry, as it can be in ordinary talk today – when I went to Israel in 1989 with some other theological students we flew on El Al, the Israeli airline. Every announcement over the PA from the captain began with the words, 'Shalom and good evening, ladies and gentlemen.' It became meaningless after a while.

But when Jesus says, 'Peace be with you', it is significant each time for what it introduces. So we're going to look at that Resurrection Shalom today.

The **first** time Jesus says 'Peace be with you' (verse 19) he shows the assembled disciples 'his hands and side' (verse 20). Why would that be related to a greeting of peace?

On the surface of it, and I've read the text this way for years, Jesus showing the disciples his wounds seems simply to be a way of him saying, 'Look, guys, it's really me,' and there must be an element of this since they react with joy, because they have seen the Lord (verse 20b).

But there's more. Jesus' talk of peace will take them back to some of their conversation at the Last Supper when he twice promised them peace despite the fact that they would have tribulation in the world (John 14:27, 16:33). One of those is a verse we often read at funerals:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

It's the wounds of Jesus that give us peace. It's his death on the Cross that brings us the peace of God.

In other words, when life is bad, remember Jesus died for you. When the world turns against you, remember Jesus died for you. No matter what life throws at you, nothing can change the fact that Jesus died for our sins, and that stands as greater than any evil that might befall us.

No wonder the Apostle Paul had this to say in Romans chapter 8:

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Where are you being troubled at present? Remember Jesus died for you. That's bigger.

The **second** time Jesus says 'Peace be with you' he immediately goes on to say, 'As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you' (verse 21). What's the connection here?

The peace God gives through Christ's death on the Cross is the most wonderful gift. But it's not private, it's for all. It's a gift that needs to be shared. Hence, why Jesus says he is sending his disciples, just as the Father sent him.

However, many of us get nervous about that. The world is, as we've just been thinking, a place where it isn't always easy to be a Christian. Sometimes our witness is appreciated and sometimes it's derided. For those early Christians, they from time to time had to put their lives on the line, just as millions of our brother and sister disciples have to do today in countries that are hostile to our faith.

I've just been reading a book by a Western Muslim who converted to Christianity, and one of the things that is clear towards the end of the book is how painful it was for him to tell his parents of his conversion, and the alienation it caused. There was a severe rift. They did not attend his wedding.¹ There is a price to pay for faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

So what does Jesus do for us? As well as giving us the power of the Holy Spirit (which is also mentioned in this reading but we'll leave considering the Spirit until Pentecost) he blesses us with his peace. We may be nervous to begin speaking, but when we do so we find the peace of Jesus within.

In other words, when we speak about all that Jesus has done for us, we're not only doing it *for* him, we're doing it *with* him, because he gives us his peace and his Spirit.

The **third** time Jesus says 'Peace be with you' is when Thomas is present, and what follows is the dialogue between the two of them where Jesus offers Thomas the opportunity to confirm the truth in the way he had said by putting his fingers and hands in the wounds. However, Thomas doesn't need to after all; instead, he confesses that Jesus is his Lord and his God (verses 26-29).

What do we make of Thomas? Was he really Doubting Thomas? Really he was no different from the other male disciples when they heard from Mary Magdalene that the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb. It's unfair to suggest he had less faith than the others. They too had needed to be convinced by Jesus appearing to them.

I prefer the approach taken by the scholar and blogger Ian Paul. He [tells a story](#) about how he took a primary school assembly one day and asked the children who their heroes were. Then he claimed to have met all these people on his way to the school. Of course they knew he hadn't, but he asked them how they would have felt if he really had met their heroes like that, and they had missed out. One child put up their hand and said, 'I would be very angry!' Ever since then, Ian Paul hasn't referred to 'Doubting Thomas': he has called him 'Angry Thomas', because there's a real sense here that Thomas is miffed because he's missed out.

An angry person needs the peace of Christ. Jesus makes sure Thomas doesn't ultimately miss out, and he clearly considers his desire for evidence perfectly reasonable.

It's worth thinking here about what faith actually is. You've heard the child's definition of faith as 'Believing in something that you know isn't true,' something that some militant atheists have taken up and used to taunt believers. But that just goes to show how childish such people are.

Because faith is quite the opposite. It isn't proof, but it's having enough evidence to hand in order to trust. It's where a healthy couple are on their wedding day. They are saying they know enough about the one they love to trust in their relationship from here until death. They don't know everything about their new spouse, only a little in fact, but they know enough to take that step of faith.

And Jesus knows we need to know enough to trust him. What that will be will vary from person to person, but he is willing to provide it – sometimes quickly as with Thomas, sometimes in stages over a longer time. He provides what we need to dispel our anxieties or anger that prevent faith, and thus brings his peace to us.

¹ Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus (Second Edition)*.