Grace and Peace to you, from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. 
Amen.

In our Lord’s Farewell Discourse, which takes place on the night that he is betrayed, Jesus had spoken with his disciples about leaving them. He was going to go away from them, but he was going to leave something with them. He says to them,

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27, KJV)

Jesus gives his disciples a new kind of peace; Jesus is giving his disciples his own peace. And because Jesus’ disciples have this peace, troubled hearts can be set to rest, fears can be laid aside. But what is this peace, and where shall we go to get it? The world offers all sorts of peace: sometimes we hear talk of going to war so that peace might be established: once the enemies have all been vanquished and you have triumphed, so our world says, then there will be lasting peace. Our world talks about financial peace: once you have financial security, or the right position or job, then lasting peace will follow. There are all sorts of ways that our world might promise peace. But Jesus clearly says that he gives peace not as the world gives. So what is this peace? Where shall we acquire it?

In this morning’s Gospel story we encounter just such peace. When Jesus greets his disciples, he is giving a new kind of peace on earth—a kind of peace that is not earned by anything that we could do, but given: “my peace I give unto you,” Jesus had said. This is a peace grander than this world has ever known. This is so, because of the one from whom it comes. Jesus calls this peace his own peace. So what is the peace that Jesus has?

When Jesus appears to his disciples in this reading, this is the very evening after the resurrection. Just that morning, Jesus had been raised from the dead. As John tells the story, only Mary of Magdalene has yet seen Jesus after being crucified and placed in a tomb. We find the disciples huddling together, hiding from those who had killed Jesus. No longer hindered by closed and locked doors, Jesus appears to his disciples, and speaks his first words to them after the resurrection: “Peace be with you,” he says. Then he shows them his
wounds in his hands and in his side, and a second time, he says, “Peace be with you.” A week later, on the first Sunday after the resurrection, this whole scene is repeated for the one disciple who was absent, Thomas. Jesus again appears in their midst and says, “Peace be with you.” Jesus shows Thomas his hands and his side, and Thomas responds in the greatest testimony of who Jesus is by any of the disciples in all of the gospels: “My Lord, and my God.”

Three times in our reading, Jesus greets his disciples with the words, “Peace be with you.” Now it is certainly true that the disciples were not in a state of peace. Three days before they had seen their lord and master brutally killed. More accurately, only one of them had seen him executed, the rest had all fled and had to hear the story from others. They had all said that they would follow Jesus to the very end, even if it meant death. But none of them had fulfilled their promises to Jesus. Instead, Jesus was crucified, not between two of his disciples, but between two common thieves.

So, their master and friend and lord had just been killed, and they had all abandoned him. On top of their recognition of their own failures, and of their loss of a friend and master, they likely also wondered what would become of them. It was well known that they were followers of Jesus. Would they be turned over to the Romans and crucified as well? So, when Jesus appears amongst them and says, “peace be with you,” it is not hard to see that they are in need of some peace.

But how could Jesus say this to his disciples? In a certain sense, nothing had changed for the disciples. They are still a small ragtag group made up mostly of former fishermen hiding from the local and the international officials in an obscure Roman province. When Jesus says, “Peace be with you,” this is not a mere formal greeting, nor is it a mere wish on his behalf. Even though it may be the case that this was an ordinary greeting amongst first century Jews, in the mouth of Jesus nothing remains ordinary. When Jesus says, “Peace,” he gives peace, he bestows peace.

This peace is more far-reaching than any anxiety the disciples may have been feeling at the time; this peace remains in spite of whatever circumstance his disciples might find themselves in. Remember, this peace was promised on the night that Jesus was betrayed. And now, after his betrayal, after his crucifixion and death and his descent into hell, Jesus gives this peace to his disciples. Though their circumstances may not seem to be much changed, it is the identity of the one giving peace that makes all the difference.

For Jesus the Crucified has taken his humanity all the way to the bitter dregs of God’s judgment upon sin and alienation; Jesus has just plumbed the depths
of humanity’s estrangement from God and from one another, he descended
into hell. Jesus loved his own who were in the world to the very end, to the
very final form of love, and he has the marks on his body to prove it. And from
the depths of hell, the Father has raised him. And so, when Jesus gives peace,
it is no ordinary peace, it is not mere peace before or after a storm, it is the
peace of the one who spoke peace and the storm stilled; it is not the peace that
exists because their happens to be no wars or disagreements, it is the peace of
the one who defeated death and hatred and evil altogether; it is the peace that
comes when all things have been set to rights, when all things are as they
ought to be; it is the peace that Jesus Christ won by reconciling sinful
humanity to a righteous and holy God through his own life and death; it is the
peace that transcends all understanding because it is God’s own peace; the
peace that can only come from the one who has cried, “It is finished.”

Jesus Christ comes and gives peace to his disciples because he has earned
eternal peace between God and humanity, he has accomplished all that God
had wanted and planned in creation, and all that is left is for this
accomplishment to be shared, spread around, given. And so Jesus gives
peace, his own peace, peace that the world cannot give.

But in the end, this peace is not just some thing that he gives. As Saint Paul
says in the letter to the Ephesians, “now in Christ Jesus you who once were far
off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace”
(2:13–14). Jesus is our peace. The peace that he gives is himself. The
resurrected Christ appears to his disciples, not as one who has left what took
place on the cross behind him, but Jesus Christ appears to his disciples as the
one who yet bears the scars of his crucifixion, who bears the marks on his
body of the love that he has for his own beloved creatures. In both
appearances to the disciples he gives his peace, and shows his wounds. The
wounds of Jesus are inseparable from the peace that he gives. For the wounds
show what this peace is: the peace is what was wrought in Jesus’ own body.
The peace is the fruit of his labor. In Jesus Christ, quite literally, in his Body,
humankind and God are at peace. And all who are given his Spirit—as the
disciples were given in this first appearance, and as all who have been
baptized like Keitaro and Kojeiro were at the Easter Vigil—all who are given
his Spirit have this peace between them as well.

And so it is fitting that at the beginning of the liturgy of the Meal, we take
Jesus’ own words into our mouths and share the peace that he has given to us.
We take Jesus’ words on our lips, and give what we have received. For what
we have received is Jesus himself, who comes to us and gives himself to us,
clothed in his peace. And so when we say these words, we can know that this
is not an empty saying, but for our neighbor we are standing in Jesus’ stead
and saying on his behalf, “peace be with you.” And when we hear these same words on the lips of our sister or brother, we can receive them as from Jesus himself, not as if they were from Jesus, but as from Jesus himself, for he is the only peace that we have, the only peace that we can give. This does not mean that suddenly all of humanity’s problems are done away with; it doesn’t simply eliminate all that is wrong in the world. But it does change our encounter with that which is wrong. This was the case for the disciples too. Jesus gave his peace, his all-things-as-they-ought-to-be peace, and yet they still lived under threat of those who had killed Jesus, and indeed many of them would be killed for Jesus’ sake. But this peace that Jesus gives, this peace that we share with one another, is something that even death cannot take away. And so we can say to one another with full assurance and with true hope in Christ, “Peace be with you.”

Then, after having shared the peace of Jesus, when we come up to the table, it is the crucified one that we encounter. When we come receive his body that was broken, and his blood that was poured out, it is all of the fruits of his wounds that are extended to us. And as it is extended to us, given to us, we are included in his ongoing life of peace with his Father, which he now lives for us, for the sake of the world. And then we leave here as ministers of peace, spreading abroad in the world the good news that Christ Jesus is risen from the dead. To him be glory with his Father and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever. Amen.