Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16
In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me.
Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.
You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name’s sake lead me and guide me, take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge.
Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.
My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

John 14:1-7
“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.
And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

It could be said that the building block of faith which may just be the most basic and essential of all is the peace of Christ. In fact, peace is the keystone, that is, in architectural terms, the wedge-shaped stone at the center top, the matrix of a masonry arch that locks all the other stones in place. The keystone is the final piece placed during construction that locks the arch in place and allows the entire structure to bear weight.

The peace of Christ is for us that very keystone that holds the whole structure of life and faith together and makes it possible to bear the weight of anything that would make us anxious or fearful. And how we long for that peace in these anxious days.

Throughout the 14th Chapter of John’s Gospel, we hear Jesus speaking to his disciples on the last night he is with them all, before leaving to go into Jerusalem where he will meet his death. Try to imagine that moment. Surely those first disciples were anxious and afraid that night. Beset by threats of violence from the Roman soldiers, and vulnerable to acts of abandonment and betrayal from within their own company. They were no doubt disoriented and already grieving the loss of the teacher and friend.

Jesus knows. He loves them dearly. He is their Good Shepherd. And so, in the midst of it all, to comfort them, to heal them, to assure them, he gives them this incredible, unexpected, almost unimaginable gift: peace. “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.”

Scholars point out that the Greek word used here which we translate as “give” actually means something closer to “bequeath.” At this tender moment, just prior to his death, Jesus bequeaths his peace to his followers. He bestows peace upon them, grants peace to them, commits peace to them, entrusts peace to them. Peace is the legacy he leaves with those who love him. It is his lasting will and testament.

His peace. The peace that comes from God. The peace that passes all understanding. He gives it to his first disciples on his last night with them and then when he appears to them after his resurrection, as our Risen Lord, he greets them saying: “Peace be to you!” He anoints them with peace, a peace that imparts unto them all the benefits of resurrection life even as they face into their deepest fears. This is the peace with which Christ blesses us.

Blessed with this peace, disciples, then as now, seek to live lives of love and faithful service, day in, day out, come what may. That precious peace can come in and out of focus, can it not? In effect, Jesus says to them: living this way of faith is a process, a spiritual practice. It is a life-long journey with him as we continue to call ourselves back, again and again, to his teaching and his gifts to us. He told them: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” Even before earliest followers of Jesus were called “Christians,” they were known as the People of the Way. They moved forward, along with their Risen Lord, in response to a call upon their hearts, a tug in their soul.
They weren't people who “went to church.” They weren't people who joined a church. They weren't a church or a denomination. They hadn't been in a sanctuary for fifty years. They weren't a formal group of any kind defined by a checklist of essential beliefs.

They were people whose lives were transformed and made new by the teaching and preaching and healing ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, people who came to understand that he was the Messiah, people who said “Yes, I want to be part of this new way of living and talking and acting and loving and walking.”

This is faith lived out, walked into, with peace at the center. Faith, in the words of American writer and civil rights activist Lillian Smith, faith that takes us around the unknown curve.

In these challenging times, we all long for the deep peace of Christ to center us, steady us, and give us the strength to keep going around this unknown curve we find ourselves in.

So in these coming days, I encourage you to re-read this part of John’s Gospel, Chapter 14. Read it slowly and meditatively, prayerfully. Let his words heal you and sink deep into your soul. Practice going to the place of his peace in your heart and soul. May his peace become that keystone that holds the whole structure of life and faith together and makes it possible to bear the weight of anything that would make us anxious or fearful.

You know, I learned the most fascinating thing last week. About birds. I've felt on my morning walks what so many of you have reported as well. The birds seem to be singing louder these days. I thought...well, humans stay home. Cars stay put. The birds are filling up the space.

But studies done by ornithologists reveal that the birds are actually singing more softly these days. With the hustle and bustle of traffic quieted, the world more calm, they can sing softly and still hear one another. And in the quiet, we can hear them, too.

How can we make the most of the imposed stillness of these days? What can we hear more clearly now? The birds, to be sure. All the things love can do. And how about Jesus' invitation to "let not our hearts be troubled and neither let them be afraid." How about his invitation into his peace?

May his words resonate within us now on a deeper, quieter level. For still, he says softly to us: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”

Christ is Risen! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Alleluia. Amen.