

“Peace Be With You”

A week ago we greeted each other with this joyful greeting: “He is risen! He is risen indeed!” Today our resurrection celebration continues as we hear another greeting: “Peace be with you.”

“Peace be with you.” The disciples must have heard such a greeting many times. They had no doubt shared that greeting with each other and heard it from a variety of people. For a long time the Jewish people had greeted each other with a wish of peace, including health and safety and happiness and other blessings. It was a kind greeting that perhaps by its constant use had lost some of its depth and richness.

Then Jesus used it that night. Suddenly it meant more than it ever had. Suddenly it was more than a wish or a greeting. When Jesus said to his disciples, “Peace be with you,” he was giving them the peace that passes understanding. Jesus did not merely wish for peace or hope for peace. He accomplished peace and he shared it. He shared it with the disciples, and he shares it with us, his disciples today. When Jesus says, “Peace be with you,” he gives peace to us to know and to share.

That night was the night of Easter Sunday. As John records in his Gospel, already that day Mary Magdalene had found the empty tomb and had told Peter and John about it. The two of them had run to the tomb and seen it empty as well. Later on, Mary told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and he had spoken with her.

After that, our text tells us: **“¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.”**

Besides the strange events of that Sunday, the disciples were no doubt still trying to sort out all that had happened on Thursday and Friday. Their Messiah, their leader, had been arrested and tried and tortured and killed. And they had run away.

In our text John mentions their fear. They were afraid of the Jews, afraid of those who had arrested and convicted Jesus. The disciples locked themselves inside that evening so that they could be safe and would not be bothered by their enemies.

But even the locked doors could not keep out the risen Jesus. He came and stood among the disciples. He verified that it was him by showing them the scars of his crucifixion. And he shared with them that beautiful greeting: “Peace be with you.”

Peace is exactly what the disciples needed. They were afraid, they were uncertain. The more they thought about what they had seen and heard and done, the more they realized their own

sinfulness and shortcomings. They had abandoned their teacher and their leader, the one that they themselves had confessed to be the Son of God. And they had lost him to death.

But now here he was, alive and standing with them. He didn't just wish them peace or offer them peace, he gave them peace. The same peace he had earlier spoken about when he told them, **"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). He was dead, but now he is alive. He accomplished exactly what he promised and did exactly what he said he would do. The disciples did not need to be afraid of the Jews or of anyone else, because the risen Jesus gave them peace. His appearance assured them that he had taken away their sins, just as he had promised. His resurrection meant that they had peace with God the Father, and that eternal life and salvation were theirs. That's what it meant for them to have peace.

And that's what it means for us to have peace. We minimize peace when we think about it the way the world does. People around us want peace. They want soldiers to return home. They want countries to get along. But ultimately that's a very shallow peace for us. We still have to suffer the fear of not knowing what might come our way. We still have to deal with possible job losses or pay cuts. And even worse, we still have to deal with that little voice inside us that knows all sorts of things that we've done wrong. It knows that we haven't always listened to or obeyed God, and it knows that he has every right to punish us. And it warns us about what could happen if we were to meet God face-to-face.

That's life without true peace, but now Jesus comes to us in his Word. He lets us see the scars of his suffering and death. He reminds us that all he went through he went through for us. He even gives us his true body and blood in the sacrament of Holy Communion. He comes to us and says, "Peace be with you." And it's not the sort of peace that comes from ignoring these things or taking a vacation and forgetting about them for a while. It is the peace that he has established between us sinners and God by taking away our sin. And it is the peace of knowing and believing that it is true. It is the peace of knowing and believing that no matter what happens, heaven is our home and we will one day live there with our Lord forever.

And that peace is not only for us. It's for us to share. Just as Jesus sent out his disciples that Easter evening, so he sends us to share his peace.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus repeated his greeting to his disciples, and this time he added that he was sending them out. Just as God the Father had sent Jesus into the world with a particular purpose, so the disciples were to serve God and fulfill his purpose. Jesus instructed them to share his peace. He instructed them to go out with the message of forgiveness, and he equipped them through his special gift of the Holy Spirit.

Disciples of Jesus today have the same purpose. In calling us to faith, God has equipped us with the Holy Spirit. He sends his believers to **"Go and make disciples"** (Matthew 28:19) and to

“**preach the good news**” (Mark 16:15), the gospel, the message of Jesus Christ and the peace that he brings.

As we go out, Jesus gives us the keys, as he calls them in Matthew 16:19, “**the keys of the kingdom of heaven.**” He gives us the right to forgive sins. We can announce to those who recognize their sinfulness, who repent of their sin and acknowledge their fault, “Jesus died to take away your sins. Jesus died to take away the sins of the world. And he rose again. God requires no further payment for your sin. You are forgiven.”

Jesus also warns us that some will reject the message of the gospel. They will insist that their sins are no big deal. They will blame someone else for all of their faults. They will remain impenitent, insistent that they do not need a Savior. Jesus instructed his disciples, “**if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.**” To these sinners who by their words and actions confess to us their impenitence, we must announce the sad truth: “Your sins are not forgiven. If you rely on yourself instead of on Jesus, if you want to face God on your own, he will demand the full punishment that your sins deserve. The door to heaven is locked for you.”

It is a very serious matter to announce this truth to impenitent sinners. It is not easy to have to say to someone that because of their sins they will spend eternity in hell. But it is necessary. It is necessary for us to recognize the seriousness of our own sin, and it is necessary for us to warn others about their sin.

And it is our joy and privilege whenever someone repents, despairs of their ability to save themselves, and acknowledges their need of a Savior to point to Jesus. We point to the nail marks in his hands that prove that went to the cross for our sins. We point to the scar left on his side where the spear proved that he had indeed died, and we point to his resurrection appearances as proof that he is alive forever. And we have peace. We have peace to know and believe, and peace that we get to share with others.