

042422 "Peace be with You" John 20: 19-31

Today's passage recounts the Lord appearing before several disciples, proving His resurrection to them Himself and giving them a new command. I'd like us to think about 'peace' today – it's easy for us to miss out on its true meaning and think about it only in an abstract way, because it's so familiar to us. I hope God's peace will resonate in every part of our lives.

After the Resurrection, Christ revealed Himself to several disciples personally. Mary, Peter and others met the Resurrected Jesus personally. But the other disciples who did not see him directly did not believe in the news of His resurrection. So this time, Christ revealed Himself when all the disciples were gathered, proving His Resurrection completely.

The Bible tells us that at the time, the disciples were in fear, and had their doors firmly locked – their hearts had not been at peace. In this context, Jesus' greeting "Peace be with you" can be interpreted in different ways. First possibility is that Jesus wanted to calm the surprised disciples and reassure them not to worry "It's me!" Luke 24:37 says, "They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?" Alternatively, as 'shalom' was a common greeting in the Old Testament. For example, 1 Samuel 25:6 says, "Thus you shall salute him: 'Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have.'" We could interpret it as a simple greeting like

“How are you? How have you been?”

But if we look at the entirety of John 20, verse 19 tells us that the disciples are currently hiding from the Jews. They had the doors locked and secured, fearing that the Jews will get to them. With their teacher and Lord crucified on the cross, and some suffering from guilt of having turned away from Him, the disciples were in a state of panic. To them, the first thing that Jesus said was “Peace be with you,” repeated twice (verse 21). This tells us that Jesus’ words were more than just a simple greeting.

The disciples were probably not all so overjoyed. They were surprised and even scared. They may have been startled by His sudden appearance, but they definitely had a lot of guilt as well. Judas Iscariot had betrayed Jesus, Peter had denied ever knowing Him. All the other disciples had run away, deserting Jesus to die alone.

Thus, every narrative recounting Resurrection starts with fear. The Bible shows us many disciples who were grappled with fear – and in turn, we see ourselves reflected in them. Perhaps each and every one of us lives in fear and insecurity. Fear of loss, fear of rejection, fear of solitude, fear of the future... But Jesus, having risen again, walks straight into that fear and tells us to be at peace.

It’s so hard to be satisfied in this world. The have-nots want to have; the haves want to have more. There’s no end of this. This greed makes us insecure, concerned, and worried. But the apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 4:11 that he

learned how to be content in the Lord: "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

Paul had learned to be content not by being at peace with the world, but being at peace with Christ. He finally gained complete and full satisfaction by being at peace in the Lord. The state of "contentness" that the Bible encourages us to have is not a silent resignation. Neither is it a complete disregard for the world and its difficulties. Being content is not giving up, not having any desires at all. On the contrary, being content means to actively seek and to hope – except that the object of this seeking is not the world, but the Christ. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus said, "But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

"Being content" means longing for the Christ who created you, knows you, cares for you, understands you, and loved you to death. It means longing for the Mighty Christ who conquered death and was risen again. We are at peace and we feel content not because the circumstances have changed, but because the Lord loves us, because we know that He won't leave us alone in fear. If we believe that He is with us, then the desert is not the end – this is the peace that Jesus gives us.

If we look at the word 'peace' closely (shalom in Hebrews, εἰρήνη in Greek), the original meaning of the verb form of this word was "to unite." Because of sin, people live as if our relationship with the creator never existed, as if we have nothing to do with God – this is the sin that the Bible talks about. But peace unites us again, overcoming the brokenness to tie us with God again. As St. Augustin once said, "wherever we are – there is no real peace before we are in the arms of the Christ." Thomas Watson also said that the righteous man enters eternal peace when he dies, but the peace enters him when he is alive.

Without Godly peace at heart, the Christ cannot work through us. If our hearts are filled with the worries and concerns of the world, the Lord cannot work in us, and we cannot live as witnesses of Jesus and His mighty power. Part of the reason why so many Christians fail to live out the mission as light and salt of this world, losing social influence, is because we don't recognize the importance of peace that Jesus so emphasized. We're often desperate to get into the school we want, to get the job we need – we panic when there's material need. But do we feel this urgent need and desperation to unite with the Lord and to be connected to Him? Do you ask for the Lord's peace as much as you wish for problems to be resolved?

After meeting the Resurrected Christ, receiving His peace and the Holy Spirit, the disciples' lives were transformed. Acts 5:27-32 tells us that the same disciples that had lived locked up in fear now testified the truth boldly in front

of the high priest.

But peace is not the end. Jesus commands the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit and be witnesses of Him – the same command applies to us. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and channel the peace that He gives us.

I'd like to close my sermon with one story.

Austin Miles was originally educated and trained as a pharmacist, but after achieving some success as a songwriter, he became a full-time music editor. Miles' hobby was photography, and he had managed to build his own "darkroom" for developing his film. Miles' most famous song by far is "In the Garden." He provided this story of the song's composition:

One day in March, 1912, I was seated in the dark-room, where I kept my photographic equipment and organ. I drew my Bible toward me; it opened at my favorite chapter, John XX—whether by chance or inspiration let each reader decide. That meeting of Jesus and Mary had lost none of its power to charm. As I read it that day, I seemed to be part of the scene. I became a silent witness to that dramatic moment in Mary's life, when she knelt before her Lord, and cried, "Rabboni!"

My hands were resting on the Bible while I stared at the light blue wall. As the light faded I seemed to be standing at the entrance of a garden, looking down a gently winding path, shaded by olive branches. A woman in white, with head

bowed, hand clasping her throat, as if to choke back her sobs[싸-압쓰], walked slowly into the shadows. It was Mary. As she came to the tomb, upon which she placed her hand, she bent over to look in, and hurried away.

John, in flowing robe, appeared, looking at the tomb; then came Peter, who entered the tomb, followed slowly by John. As they departed, Mary reappeared, leaning her head upon her arm at the tomb, she wept. Turning herself, she saw Jesus standing, so did I. I knew it was He. She knelt before Him, with arms outstretched and looking into His face cried, "Rabboni!"

I awakened in full light, gripping the Bible, with muscles tense and nerves vibrating. Under the inspiration of this vision I wrote as quickly as the words could be formed the poem exactly as it has since appeared. That same evening I wrote the music. [Carlton R. Young, "In the Garden," Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 432.]

Reverently he thought, "This is not an experience limited to a happening almost 2,000 years ago. It is the daily companionship with the Lord that makes up the Christian's life."

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, Jesus, who has risen, wants us to be at peace. Peace be with you! Peace be with you! He wants the Holy Spirit to work in our lives so that His glory may be manifested in us. Our Lord meets us where we are. Children are tired, adults falter, but those who hope in the Lord

gain new strength without fail. [It is the daily companionship with the Lord that makes up the Christian's life.](#) Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you and your family, and your business, and your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.