

The Peace of the Resurrected Christ

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April 12, 2020

John 20:19-23

Good Morning, Perry Creek and Happy Resurrection Sunday! He is risen! Well today, I have my Easter clothes on and today I want to talk to you about peace: the peace that the Resurrected Christ offers us on this Easter Sunday.

About this time last year my best friend Phil in Zimbabwe faced a moment when he desperately needed someone to speak a word of peace over his life. He needed someone to tell him that it was going to be OK, that times of rest and healing and even joy were still ahead for him. He needed someone to speak peace to him. If you were with us last Easter, you probably know that. That's because last year at Easter, my friend Phil was diagnosed with cancer. Phil had been having headaches and his vision had started to blur, so he went into the doctor. The doctor ran some tests. They called Phil and his wife in on Monday of Holy Week last year, and the doctor spoke those words no one wants to hear: "Mr. Rankin, you have stage 4 cancer." They told him there was a primary tumor in his lungs, but that it had spread to his brain and that it didn't look good.

Many of you remember that story. Many of you started praying for Phil then and have asked me how he's been doing. If you want some great Easter news, let me tell you: He's doing fine! Against all odds with a lot of medicine and even more prayer, Phil is almost done with treatment. He's strong and healthy, and he has fought off most of the cancer in his body. He just got back from visiting his Grandkids in Australia, and he's well! But I can tell you that this time last year was a very different situation. At that time, Phil desperately needed someone to speak peace to him.

You know there are times when we all need someone to speak peace to us, times when we're fearful and we want to know if it's going to be safe, times when we're facing challenges and we need to know if we're going to make it through, times when we face trauma or grief and we want to know if things will ever feel normal again. There are times when we all need someone to speak peace.

This is one of those times, and it's not just us as individuals. Our whole nation, really the whole world, needs a word of peace right now, doesn't it? I saw an article on the internet this week that said Americans are very worried about three things:

- 1) We're worried about our health, obviously.
- 2) We're worried about the economy.
- 3) We're worried about the future.

We're concerned and we're longing for a word of peace.

But there's a problem: Who is it that's truly qualified to give us a word of peace? Who is it that has the insight, the experience, the authority to actually tell us that things are going to be OK?

President Trump? Anthony Fauci? The WHO? Who is it that can speak the word of peace that we desperately need? We wonder.

Well in the midst of this question comes the Resurrected Christ and the passage that we are going to look at today. Today we are going to look at a passage where the resurrected Christ comes to fearful, huddled disciples who, like us, are concerned about their safety and about their future and where he gives them a word of peace. If you have a Bible, let me invite you to turn to John 20:19-23. Today we are going to look at the peace that the resurrected Jesus wishes the disciples, the peace he wishes us. As we look at it, we're going to see something that truly amazed me as I studied it this week. We're going to see that the peace that Jesus offers is so much bigger, so much better than we would think. Today as we look at this passage we are going to focus on three things about this peace:

- 1) We're going to look at the source of this peace.
Who is it that's offering us peace in this difficult time?
- 2) We're going to look at the nature of this peace. What is it exactly that's on offer here?
- 3) We're going to look at the recipients of the Peace. Who is this offered to?

We're going to look at these three things and, in each instance, we are going to see that the peace that the resurrected Christ offers us is so much bigger, so much better than we ever thought possible.

So, we're going to read John 20:19-23, but first let me set the scene for you. This event occurred on the evening of Resurrection Sunday when Mary Magdalene saw the resurrected Jesus, and Peter and John saw the empty tomb. As we come to this passage, the disciples are scared and for good reason. In one week, they have watched their fortunes reverse completely. They've gone from arguing about who was going to be greatest in the Kingdom to fleeing for their lives. Their leader, who they thought could overcome anything, had died!

Although Peter and John had begun to believe when they saw the empty tomb, they still didn't have the pieces put together. What exactly had happened to Jesus' body? Was he some kind of ghost now? Was he in heaven? Where was he and what did his disappearance mean for them? Likely as not, the empty tomb actually meant that the Jewish religious authorities were going to come after the disciples in some big mop-up operation. So as we come to this passage, the disciples are scared. That's where we are when John says this:

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!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

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

- John 20:19-23

Today we are going to look at this peace that Jesus offered to his disciples and offers to us. It's just four words in English - "Peace be to you" - and two in Hebrew - "Shalom Elekim." This was the common Hebrew greeting of Jesus' day. It meant to wish God's blessing on someone in every sphere of their life. But here, Jesus means it as far more than just a greeting. That's why he repeats it twice in our passage and again in the next one. Jesus is offering a peace that is far greater than any Jewish greeting, far greater than we or the disciples would think at first. So let's look at how this peace is greater. First, let's look at who is offering this peace:

The peace is offered not just by Christ, but by the crucified, resurrected Christ

John starts the story in verses 19-20. Look at what he says:

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!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord

- John 20:19-20

So Jesus wishes them peace. Now when we first read that, we probably assume that we know who is offering the disciples peace. It's Jesus, right? You know good old Jesus that the disciples know and love and have spent three years with. Just Jesus. But if we look at the story closely, we can see that this is a very different Jesus.

For starters this is a guy that can go anywhere, right? As the story starts, fear has put the disciples in a small room behind a locked door. Honestly, they're kind of where we're at these days. But suddenly in the midst of those locked doors, Jesus is there! John says "He was suddenly in their midst."

Now I have wondered and other people have wondered how did that work? How did he do it? Did Jesus go through the locked doors? Did he blow the doors open and come through? Did he come in through a window? We wonder, but as I studied it this week, I realized something I'd never seen before: "Figuring out how Jesus came in is not the point"! The point isn't whether Jesus went through locked doors, or opened the doors, or came in through a window. The point is this: A locked door is no obstacle to the resurrected Christ. A locked door is no obstacle. He can be wherever he needs to be, whenever he needs to be there, with whoever he needs to be with.

One of the great tragedies of this coronavirus is that it's so explosively contagious that people can't be with their loved ones in the hospital. People take their loved ones to the hospital to be tested, and the next thing they know they're separated, and they aren't allowed any contact or visits. I saw one elderly man on the news the other day, crying because he didn't want his wife to die alone. It's heartbreaking. But I have to say something on the basis of this passage: They're not alone. The resurrected Christ is with them. He walks the hallways of those hospitals, and he will be with his people in their hour of need. He can go anywhere.

But this Jesus is more than just someone who can go anywhere. This is the crucified, resurrected Jesus. He points that out to his disciples. He identifies himself by his wounds. Did you catch that? Jesus appears and, when the disciples want to know who he is, he doesn't say "Look at my face." He doesn't say "Don't you recognize my voice." He shows them his wounds. That's significant, church, because standing before them is not just Jesus, but the crucified, resurrected Jesus, and that gives him the ability to offer true peace. Here is someone who paid for sin. (More on that in a moment). But listen, it also means here is someone who has been through it.

He's been through it. You know when you're going through something difficult, whether it's some sickness like cancer or whether it's grief or divorce or some sort of trauma in your life, you don't just want to talk to someone who wishes you well. You want to talk to someone who's been through it, right? Others can wish you well. They can pray. They can sympathize, but the person who's been through it has the authority to speak true comfort.

Early in Phil's diagnosis, Kelley and I prayed. We wished him and his wife well. We emailed them Bible verses. We cried for them. We did everything we could. The person who offered them the greatest encouragement by far was someone they happened to run into at the hospital who had been through cancer. She could offer a completely different kind of encouragement. She could speak with authority. She could say this is what you're up against. This is where it's going to get tough. This is how it's going to be OK. She could be their guide. She could give them hope. She was someone who was uniquely qualified to speak to that moment.

Hear me Perry Creek: On Resurrection Sunday 2020 in the midst of this pandemic, in the midst of this world-wide economic meltdown, in the midst of this fear, and stress, and sickness, and worry about the future, the person offering us peace is not just some general well-wisher. It's someone who has been through it. The disciples were afraid of persecution, being arrested, being beaten? Jesus had been through it. What are we afraid of? An inconvenient life? Poverty? Sickness? You know that the worst that can happen to us is death and Jesus has already been there. He has experienced the worst that this world can dish out, and he's come out on the other side as the resurrected Christ and that makes him uniquely qualified to speak peace to us. He's been there.

(1) The peace is offered not just by Christ, but by the crucified, resurrected Christ. Let me say "When someone who has been through the worst this world has to offer materializes in front of you and offers you peace, you take it!" So that's the first thing about this peace. Now secondly, let's look at the nature of this peace.

The peace is not just physical, but spiritual.

Notice that the disciples immediate need, the thing they were most concerned about when Jesus showed up, was physical. Their doors are locked for fear of the Jews. They are afraid of

physical persecution! They are experiencing the brokenness the sin, the pain the fallenness of this world. And church, that's what many people are afraid of as we live through this pandemic. People are afraid of brokenness of the immediate and the physical. They don't want to get sick! They don't want to lose their financial security in a broken economy. They don't want to live in a world that feels like it's always out to get you with one new virus or another.

We fear the physical, and we're desperate! As I was writing this sermon, I saw a news story about a doctor in Kentucky that knocked a teenage girl down and choked her, because she wasn't practicing social distancing. People are desperate, and they're doing crazy things! Like the disciples, we fear the physical.

But notice that Jesus has a much bigger solution than just solving the immediate physical need. Jesus doesn't even talk about the physical at all here. He talks about the forgiveness of sins and he sends the Disciples out to a hostile world with the message of the gospel. That's what he does! That's because the gospel, Jesus' death and resurrection, are the ultimate solution to the brokenness of this world. See, this world operates on a system that has been infected by sin. It turns people against God, against truth, against each other. It turns creation against us. That's why we're experiencing this virus and the fallout from it. But through his death, Jesus has overcome that fallen, sinful system. When Jesus wished his Disciples Peace here, he was actually reminding them of something that he had said on the night he was arrested. Listen to what he said in John 16:33:

I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble and suffering, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.

- John 16:33

Through the gospel, through Jesus death and resurrection, he has overcome the brokenness, the sin, the fallenness of this world. It's not that we don't experience pain and sickness and even death in the here and now. Jesus said "In the world you have trouble and suffering." But because he bore the curse, this fallen world has lost its power.

When Jesus offers us peace, he is offering us forgiveness of sins and eternal life with him. The resurrection was proof of that. His Disciples recognized that. Once they saw the resurrected Jesus, it wasn't that they didn't suffer any more, although at times God did deliver them. It wasn't that it didn't suffer, but they weren't afraid. They knew that Jesus' spiritual solution was greater than any physical concern they faced.

Can I just say to you: What we really need is not just a solution to this virus. As important as that is, when we develop a vaccine for this one, another one is probably going to come along later. That's not our deepest need. What we need is a larger spiritual solution to the brokenness of this world. That's true peace and that's what Jesus offers.

So (1) The peace is offered not just by Jesus, but by the resurrected Jesus. (2) The peace is not just physical, but spiritual. Now one more way that the Peace Jesus offers is greater than we ever would have hoped, and I love this one:

The Peace is not just for disciples. It's for sinful disciples.

This is the part I love, because it's the part I need the most. This peace is for sinful disciples. See at first as we read this story, we see Jesus wishing his disciples peace, and we think "Of course, Jesus is offering them peace. They're his disciples!" Isn't that what we think? We think "This is Jesus' crew. It's his posse. These are the guys that have followed him since the beginning. No wonder he's wishing them peace!" That's what I think at first.

But there's something we need to remember. When Jesus comes to the disciples and says "Peace to you," he's not just talking to people who followed him. He's talking to people who deserted him. Did you know that? If you remember the story, all the disciples, except for John, abandoned Jesus during his arrest and crucifixion. Mark's gospel says at Jesus' arrest "Everyone deserted him." It's true. Judas betrayed him. Nine of the disciples fled. Peter and John followed from a distance, but eventually Peter denied that he knew Jesus and even took an oath to prove it. These disciples deserted Jesus in his hour of need.

So let me ask you a question: How significant is it that Jesus' first response to these disciples who had left him was to wish them peace. Did you notice that? His first words weren't "How dare you?" They weren't "Now I'm denying you." They weren't "There's something between us." His first words were simply "Peace to you." I wish you the best God can give you. I wish you peace on this earth, and I wish you forgiveness for your sins. I wish you peace. As you can see from my wounds, I've paid the price to purchase it for you. That's how Jesus responds.

This is why this passage is so important to us. None of us have followed Jesus perfectly. We've all had moments where, out of fear or temptation or just plain selfishness, we have deserted Jesus. We've sold him out. We've acted as if we don't know him. Maybe we talked about how devoted we were and thought about how great we were going to be in the kingdom, but when the moment came, we disobeyed our Lord. We refused to go to the cross.

Have you ever been there? I know you have, because I've been there. Maybe right now you need forgiveness for something you've said or done under the pressure of the last two weeks. Maybe some of you would say this morning "Yeah, it's been a long time since I followed Jesus. Truth be told I've kind of been out on my own acting like I don't actually know him." Maybe you would say "I don't even know why I'm watching this service, I just thought I'd tune in and, you know, do the Easter thing today. I'm not really sure Jesus and I are in a good place."

Can I tell you something today? Dealing with that is what Easter is all about. Easter's not just for disciples. It's for sinful disciples, disciples who struggle with their flesh, disciples who don't follow perfectly. It's for disciples like you and me who need forgiveness. This peace that Jesus offers on Easter Sunday is for everyone. Did you notice that? He says "Whoever's sins, you

forgive. Whoever accepts the message of my death and resurrection by faith is forgiven.” It’s for everyone.

And can I tell you something else? Wherever you’re at this morning, whatever room you are locked in right now, Jesus is right there with you. A locked door is no obstacle to him. If you turn to him in faith you won’t find condemnation, you won’t find judgment, you won’t find exasperation, no matter what your failing. You’ll find a resurrected Jesus who has paid for your sins and who wishes you peace, shalom wholeness, a peace far greater than we ever dreamed possible.