

EASTER 6

May 1, 2016

John 14:23-29

The Peace of the Lord

Pastor Saul Stensvaag

According to John's Gospel, the first words the risen Lord Jesus said to the disciples were, "*Peace be with you.*" **This is not just a simple greeting** When Jesus says, "*Peace be with you,*" he's giving his disciples **a priceless gift.**

When we hear Jesus' words, "*My peace I give to you*" **we want desperately to believe them.** And when we hear Jesus say, "*do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid,*" **our hearts long to obey.** Because **anxiety and fear are constant companions for us.**

Every day we face things which cause us to worry – **fears that sap our strength and threaten our future.** Fears like:

- Will our **kids grow up** to be healthy, happy, Christian adults?
- Can we **solve the problems in our marriage?**
- Did they **get all the cancer?**
- Will my **parents still love me** when they find out what I've done?
- Will I ever **find the right person** to share my life with?
- Is this really the **right time to move our family?** or,
- Will I **ever find employment again?** Will we ever **pay off our credit cards?**

I know **each of you could add to the list.** Our lives are **never far removed from anxiety and fear.**

As a woman once said to me after a sermon about our fear of death: "*Pastor, it's not death I fear, but life.*" So many things fill us with fear and worry.

And so our ears naturally perk up when Jesus talks about giving us peace. Can it be that, somehow, Jesus will deliver us from all of this? Wouldn't it be great if the peace of Jesus was **an invisible, magic shield,** protecting us from all of life's worries, cares, and sorrows?

Well, the peace of Jesus is exactly what we need. But **it's not a deliverance out of the world.** It **doesn't** promise us a life **where nothing ever goes wrong.** We need only look at Jesus' own life on earth to see that this is true.

The early Christians also knew better.

We're going to sing a favorite hymn of mine this morning, even though it's one of those **unfamiliar hymns we avoid.**

Listen to it's wonderful poetry:

They cast their nets in Galilee, just off the hills of brown; Such happy, simple fisher folk, before the Lord came down.

*Contented, peaceful fishermen, before they ever knew,
the peace of God that filled their hearts brimful, and broke them too.*

Young John, who trimmed the flapping sail, homeless in Patmos died. Peter, who hauled the teeming net, head down was crucified.

*The peace of God, it is no peace, but strife closed in the sod. Yet, let us pray for but one thing:
the marvelous peace of God, the marvelous peace of God.*

You see, the hymn writer knows that, even though the peace of Christ doesn't keep us from harm, **it is still THE ONLY PEACE WORTH HAVING.**

In the eyes of the world, the peace Christ offers may not seem like peace at all. And yet, if we truly understand it, then, as the hymn says, we will pray for but one thing, "*the marvelous peace of God.*"

Remember the time Jesus was asleep in the boat and a terrible storm arose? The disciples were sure they were going to die, but Jesus went right on sleeping.

That's because Jesus had a certain quality, a "peace", that enabled him to be calm **right in the middle of a life-threatening storm.**

You see, He **never forgot that his life was totally in God's hands.**

In the midst of all the worries and uncertainty of human existence, Jesus is certain of his relationship to God. This is the amazing peace that Jesus offers his disciples and us.

And **we even dare to hope** that the peace of Christ can **bring to our lives** the same quality of calmness and certainty we see in Jesus' life. Wouldn't that be great?

Of course, the peace of Christ doesn't keep us from having to suffer pain and sorrow, anymore than it did for Jesus.

No, this is **a peace we feel in spite of all those things that threaten to destroy us.**

It's a peace that gives us a quiet confidence and **calms the fears and anxieties of our hearts.**

How can this be? What gives this peace such power in Jesus' life? And what gives it power in our lives?

It's significant that Jesus' promise of His peace is **given in connection with a promise to give the Holy Spirit.** This Spirit is the Spirit of the Living Christ:

"Those who love me and keep my word, I and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

Christ's peace is **his presence in our hearts**, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The reason this peace is so special, the reason it's different from the world's peace, is that **the source of this gift doesn't mail it or Fed-ex it to us**. Nor does he say, "*climb this high mountain and you can have it.*"

Rather, HE BRINGS IT IN PERSON. The giver of this gift delivers it, and then stays with us to help us unwrap it and use it in our lives.

No wonder this gift can give us **assurance and calm in the midst of trouble**.

And the peace from Jesus is indeed a gift. It's not like the peace that the world offers us. You see,

- it's not given as a reward,
- it's not achieved by somehow blinding us to the pain and reality of this world, and
- it's not a peace that's bought at the expense of another person's peace and well-being.

There are **people who are fatalists**. They feel that whatever happens just can't be helped, so why even bother. But **this is not the peace of Christ**.

The peace of Christ is **the faith to trust God wholeheartedly** and to know that **God loves me, and my life is in His hands**.

So, how do we get it? How do we receive the peace of Christ? What must we do? Well, as usual, THAT'S THE WRONG QUESTION. Because Jesus' peace can't be obtained by some special training, or by an act of will on our part.

Remember? **The peace of Jesus is a gift**. Jesus promises this gift to all who believe in him – to you and to me.

He promises at **the same time that we won't be left alone** – as orphans – but will be given the Holy Spirit – the presence of God dwelling in our hearts.

The peace of Christ is grounded in our dependence on God, and our assurance that God dwells with us.

That peace and that presence can **give us the deep confidence** to face whatever life decides to throw at us. Because **the One who faced death on a cross is right here with us**, and OUR ULTIMATE FUTURE IS SAFELY IN HIS HANDS.

When Jesus says, "*Peace be with you,*" he TAKES AN ORDINARY GREETING AND MAKES IT EXTRAORDINARY. Whenever he speaks his word of peace to us, we actually receive the reality of that peace.

And that's why, ever since Jesus' day, **the passing of Christ's peace** to other Christians during worship has had **a deep and profound meaning**.

We're not just exchanging a pleasant greeting – we're EXCHANGING THE POWERFUL PEACE OF CHRIST.

When we share the peace during worship, it's tempting to forget the true meaning and make this **nothing more than a chance to chat** – a sort of **preview of the coffee hour** to come.

And so we ask our neighbor how they've been, or, if we don't know them, we may ask if they're visitors. All of this is nice, but **it's not really passing the peace of Christ, and it can wait 'til worship is over.**

Is it because the words, "*The peace of the Lord be with you*" seem too easy that we feel the need to add something?

Friends, I tell you, **there is no greater, no more powerful greeting than this, "*The peace of the Lord be with you.*" Nothing needs to be added.**

Because, in the greeting itself, Jesus TRULY GIVES THE GIFT OF PEACE.

And so I'd like to challenge you. When the time comes in worship to share the peace, **say these simple words with feeling: "*The peace of the Lord be with you.*"**

Say them as a kind of prayer or blessing.

Say them **in the real hope that your neighbor will once again experience Christ's marvelous peace**, so they can face with confidence whatever life throws at them.

Because it is indeed **the peace of the risen savior that we are privileged to share with one another.**

- It's A PEACE SUCH AS THE WORLD CANNOT GIVE.
- It's A GREETING THAT FAR SURPASSES ANYTHING ELSE WE CAN SAY, and,
- IT IS ENOUGH. Amen.