

Peace Be With You.

Text: John 20:19-23

Suggested Hymns:

99, 765T105, (or 103), 513, 162

1) The Ruin Caused By Sin

2) The Peace Jesus Has Earned and Imparts

3) The Privilege of Imparting Peace to People

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 20:19-23, ¹⁹ *Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.”*

²⁰ *When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.* ²¹ *So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”* ²² *And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.* ²³ *“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the keystone in the arch of the Christian religion. Without it our faith is void and our message is an empty thing.

The evidences of Christ’s resurrection were not lacking, but we find the disciples of Jesus indifferent to the statements of honest men and women. On Easter evening they were still responsive to the natural appeal of “*seeing is believing.*” In a closed room we find a small company of Christ’s followers completely in the throes of fear and dejection lest the fate of their Master also happen to them. There was no peace in their hearts, souls, and minds.

A loving and gracious Saviour suddenly appeared to them and demonstrated that He had indeed risen from the dead. He completely changed these fearful disciples into joyous children of God. Our Lord spoke words of heavenly

blessing upon them, and their dejection was changed into divine peace. Let us consider these words of our risen Lord, *“Peace Be With You.”* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Ruin Caused By Sin.

We read in Genesis 1:31 that *God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.* Holiness, peace, and happiness were the characteristics of God’s work of creation. But with the entrance of sin into the world a gulf of separation between the holy God and sinful man resulted in man’s exclusion from his happy and peaceful abode in Paradise. Thus with one stroke all was ruined.

Viewing this impending disaster before the foundations of the world were laid, we see the gracious plan of salvation. The Second Person of the Trinity was commissioned to be the Mediator in restoring sinful man to his original state of holiness and peaceful relationship with his God and Creator.

Beginning with the first promise of a Saviour from sin in the Garden of Eden, we notice throughout the Old Testament a gradual unfolding, from the general to the specific, of the everlasting promises of God for the redemption of mankind.

2. The Peace Jesus Has Earned And Imparts.

*“For there is born to you ... in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”*¹ was said of Christ at Christmas, and the celestial choir sang *“And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”*²

Not an earthly peace, to be sure, for Christ’s kingdom is not of this world, but a peace between the holy God and sinful man. Seeing mankind restored to their blessed state through Jesus moved the heavenly choirs to joyous song.

His Father’s business was always uppermost in the mind of Christ. He proclaimed Himself to be the heaven-sent Messiah and substantiated His claims with His miracles, *“and His disciples believed in Him.”*³

Patiently their Master taught His followers that His mission could be fulfilled only by the way of the cross. But they were slow to believe all the things foretold in the Prophets, and frequently joined their fellow men in the false expectation of an earthly kingdom. Even the disciples who ascended the slopes of

the Mount of Transfiguration were not exempt from false notions of Christ's mission.

Sorrowfully they accompanied their Lord to Calvary, and then they all fled for their lives. The joyous Easter message "*He Is Risen*"⁴ fell on deaf ears. They hid themselves "*for fear of the Jews*" lest they also be captured and even put to death.

Certainly they had themselves only to blame if their hearts were sad and their spirits apprehensive, for Jesus was very frank and open concerning all these things.

It was, therefore, a special favour that Christ appeared to these doubting disciples on this occasion, and we are grateful that He did. Locks and doors could not keep Jesus out. Though frightened as they were at the moment, when they realised that their Lord was risen and alive, when they saw the nail prints and His wounded side, when they heard Him say, "*Peace to you!*" their gloom was turned into joy, their fear into faith.

Then they realised that "*He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.*"⁵

Their risen Lord stood before them as visible proof that the sacrifice on Calvary had been accepted by God. Their sins, too, had been atoned for. Christ had finished the work. Their joy was complete, and their Lord commissioned them to proclaim this thrilling message "*Peace be with you*" to all the world.

3. The Privilege of Imparting Peace to People.

As Christ had filled the hearts of the disciples with the "*the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding*"⁶ through the knowledge that all their sins had been forgiven through faith in their risen Saviour, so they were now commissioned to bring the peace of Christ to others. "*Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*"

The work begun by God, proclaimed by angels, and fulfilled by Christ has been committed to His believers. We are doing God's work by preaching the peace of forgiveness in word and life to all with whom we come in contact.

The Apostles were faithful to their task. Once fearful of the cost, they now risked everything, even life and the favour of men, so that others might share with them what was not their sole possession.

On Pentecost these same men proclaimed all the counsel of God. Thereafter all except one suffered martyrdom for the Gospel of Christ. There was peace in their souls, and they sought to bring this salvation to a sin-stricken world. The joy of Easter made them eager to bring the forgiveness of sins, wherever they worked. They were Christ's ambassadors.

Sin, the terrible blight upon mankind, was completely removed by the atonement of Christ. The proclamation of this joyous message constitutes the business of all whom God has sent. When the disciples announced the forgiveness of sins in Christ, that was just as if Christ Himself had announced it. Jesus sent them to proclaim in His stead this message of good news.

The forgiveness of sins! Not a flattering topic, to be sure! But it is man's supreme need nevertheless! If a person speaks of his innate virtues and goodness, God's Word says, "***There is none who does good, no, not one.***"⁷

If a person is uninterested in learning or hearing God's diagnosis of his spiritual condition, if he is unresponsive to the Law of God and fails to see himself mirrored in it being "***dead in trespasses and sins***"⁸ — we know that until he receives Jesus Christ as His own Saviour, there is no real peace in his heart and soul.

What a privilege and honour it was for these disciples to carry on the work of Christ, and what a marvellous beginning they made in the discharge of their duties. Their work has been finished long ago, but still our Saviour says to you and to me, ***As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.***"²² ***And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."***

To us, then, has come the commission to preach this Gospel all people. Through us Christ says, "***Peace be with you.***" We who are called and enlightened through the Gospel are to share this joy with others.

We are to use the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments, that people may believe that all their sins have been forgiven through Christ. The convictions of troubled souls, conscious of their sins, are transformed into the peace of the children of God.

The honour and privilege of proclaiming the forgiveness of sins is given to all Christians. It is not the possession of a chosen few, but the business of all believers. When a group of believers establishes a Christian congregation, they are thereby exercising the Office of the Keys in a corporate manner.

When the called minister announces the forgiveness of sins, he is discharging for them in public what belongs to each Christian. The business of the Church is to remind people of their sins and then to pour out the soothing balm of God's peace in the glorious words of Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 9:2 "***be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.***" Sin and guilt are forever removed through the redemption of Christ.

We are not merely giving an audible report on Christ's forgiveness, but through our preaching and teaching, based as it is on the Word of God, breathe upon people the same Holy Spirit who imparts forgiveness. To bring people under the influence of the Holy Spirit means to have Christ say to them, "***Peace be with you.***"

As we celebrate Easter each Sunday in the assembling of ourselves together, it is the message "*Jesus sinners doth receive*"⁹ that cheers us. We begin the Worship Service with the confession of our sins and leave the service with the peace of God upon our soul.

In Holy Baptism the same gracious work is performed. It is a gracious water of life. Through the Word which is in and with the water, Christ's peace, the forgiveness of sins, and faith which receives such forgiveness is created in the heart. Christ takes the child, or adult, as the case might be, into His arms, as it were, and says to them, "***Peace be to you.***"

When in the heavenly Feast prepared for the children of God the believer who is troubled by his sins comes to the Table of the Lord and receives under the consecrated bread and wine Christ's true body and blood which was given and shed for him for the forgiveness of his sins, the peace of God fills his heart, and he goes on his way rejoicing.

What the world needs, engulfed as it still is in sin, is the gladsome message of our Saviour's redemption. Christ, the Head of the Church, has commissioned her to devote her energies completely to the message of peace, peace between God and man through the blood of Jesus Christ, which cleanses us from all sins.

There are many temptations to dwell on other and more popular topics, but let us never forget that man's most important question, "*What must I do to be saved?*" is to be answered by Christ's Church and people with the only correct answer, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.*"¹⁰ When we discharge this duty as a Church and in our individual lives toward one another, Christ's peace fills our hearts. For when God forgives, He forgets. Nevermore will sins rise up and condemn us. That is the peace of God.

May Christ's joyous message "*Peace be with you, Peace be to you,*" gladden our hearts today and always. May we triumphantly carry this banner forward until the day dawns when we shall dwell with Jesus as redeemed, forgiven saints of God in our heavenly home. There we shall join the celestial choirs and sing praises and hallelujahs to Christ, the Prince of Peace, forevermore. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 2:11

² Luke 2:14

³ John 2 :11

⁴ Matthew 28:6, Mark 16:6

⁵ Isaiah 53:5

⁶ Philippians 4:7

⁷ Romans 3:12

⁸ Ephesians 2:1

⁹ Hymn 317

¹⁰ Acts 16:31