

## **SERMON ON JOHN 20:19-31**

### **Jesus' presence with his disciples brings peace**

**19 April 2020 (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter)**

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The pen of a 19th century composer named John Greenleaf Whittier gave life to what has become one of the most greatly loved and sung hymns for centuries to come. This hymn is titled Dear Lord and Father of Mankind and today on this Second Sunday of Easter, I wish to focus on the last two verses which reads as follows:

Drop thy still dews of quietness,  
till all our strivings cease;  
take from our souls the strain and stress,  
and let our ordered lives confess  
the beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire  
thy coolness and thy balm;  
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
O still, small voice of calm.

There are many images contained in these words which are so appropriate to our current circumstances but it is specifically the word peace that I wish to focus on today.

John's Gospel text for today narrates to us the tense climate on the evening of resurrection day. We are told that the disciples were behind locked doors for fear of the Jews.

As I reflected on this Scripture today and on this scene, I was reminded that so many people find themselves behind locked doors of fear during

this lockdown period. Many are in the grip of fear of being infected by the Corona virus. Many live in fear of what will happen to their loved ones. Many are living in fear about their future as a result of a loss of income.

While the disciples were sitting there in the grip of fear and anxiety, the risen Lord Jesus came and stood in their midst. The first words Jesus imparts to them is “Peace be with you.” And later he repeats that same words in verse 21. Jesus did not come to judge or condemn them for their failings and shortcomings or even for deserting him. No! He came to reveal to them the living proof that what he said would happen, has happened. His very presence among them brought them joy and peace.

His presence and his greeting also confirmed the promise of John 14:27 which reads “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.” With that greeting on that evening of resurrection day, Jesus again said “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

So friends, let us look at this word peace more closely to see what it means for our lives today.

“Shalom,” the most prominent Old Testament term for “peace,” held a wide range of meanings among them being wholeness, completeness, health, security, well-being, and salvation.

The well known author and liturgist John Suggit says that we might well think of Shalom as salvation, being made whole and complete.

In the New Testament, Colossians 1:20 tells how Christ made peace through the blood of his cross.

Jesus as the Messiah ushers in God’s reign of peace. Jesus’ self-understanding as expressed in the fourth Gospel corresponds to this association. This long-expected peace of God is Jesus’ gift to the disciples (John 14:27) and it is given to them when he breathed his Spirit into them as recorded in our Gospel text today.

Real peace comes from faith in God, because God alone embodies all the characteristics of peace. To find peace of mind and heart and peace with others, we must find peace with God.

Friends just as the risen Christ met his disciples where they were, in the midst of their confusion, despair and fear, Christ's presence brought them a deep peace.

In the same way Jesus meets us where we are. He meets us in the everyday conditions and circumstances of our lives, even when we are in the grip of fear, doubt and despair during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. When things seem hopeless, Christ makes his presence known in the midst of our grief, our pain, our struggles.

Peace is indicated as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The end result of the Holy Spirit's work in our life is deep and lasting peace. Unlike worldly peace, which is usually defined as the absence of conflict, this peace is confident assurance in any circumstance. With Christ's peace, we have no need to fear the present or the future. If your life is full of stress, fear and anxiety allow the Holy Spirit to fill you with Christ's peace.

Whenever I faced a situation that caused me fear, my late mother always reassured me with these words: "Son, the sun will rise tomorrow, this too shall pass."

Beloved, God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of love, power and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).

Our Gospel text also informs us that Jesus said to his disciples "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And then he breathed on them and said "Receive the holy Spirit".

Thus, Jesus here was commissioning his disciples to proclaim the gospel of salvation and the forgiveness of sins to all of Creation. He was commissioning them to continue the work he had begun and they were to do this not in their own strength, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. In

the same way today, you and I are called to be resurrection people of hope and new life. We have the breath of the risen Christ in us. We are called to be bearers of Christ's light, love and shalom to a world that is ravaged by COVID 19 and other diseases, by selfishness, by corruption, violence, poverty and so many other manifestations of evil.

John Suggit quotes "The moment the devil ought to dread is not our going to church but our coming out." The God of mission is calling upon us to emerge from our locked doors of fear and to be His instruments of peace and healing and to reflect His love and glory into creation.

The end of every eucharist is the start of a new phase when the Church, like Christ, is sent into the world to reveal the love of God.

And so it is at the end of the Eucharist we are assured in the words of the blessing "The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his son Jesus Christ our Lord." It is with the assurance of this peace and the power of the Holy Spirit that we are sent out into the world to make resurrection a reality in our lives each day. May God bless you. AMEN.