

Peace is With You

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Traditionally we describe the story of Thomas who was absent on Easter evening but was present a week later on this Sunday after Easter. Today we will focus only on the first two verses of that account: the miraculous appearance of Jesus and the words he spoke: “Peace be with you!”

We begin with the locked room, ten disciples gathered together, with the doors locked. John confesses that this was “for fear of the Jews” or the Jewish leaders. There was a fear, maybe a reasonable one, that if the Jews had crucified the leader, they would come after the followers, although John himself had been present at the crucifixion without being arrested.

Matthew tells us in his Gospel that the High Priest and the other leaders bribed the guards to lie that Jesus’ body had been stolen, but remember that the lie was first told earlier on this same day, and we don’t know that the disciples had heard this report quite yet. Recently I made an error in my Tuesday Bible Class. We were discussing the resurrection and the bribe of the High Priest, and when people in both the morning and the evening group pointed out that Roman soldiers were put to death if they lost their prisoners, I said that I doubted that this would have troubled them in this case, since the one they were guarding was already dead and would not count as a “prisoner.” However, reading something this week by our late member, Professor Lyle Lange, I have been led to understand that Roman soldiers were also subject to death for falling asleep on duty-- so the whole Jewish lie comes unraveled in every detail.

In fact, the reason for the locked door is really unimportant. What is important is that this served to give Jesus the opportunity for a miracle. Jesus appeared! He entered the upper room through a locked door. And suddenly the ten men were eleven. The New Testament is filled with belief and proof by witnesses that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was exactly the same kind of historical truth, proved by people who saw it, as true and as real as

¹ This term comes from the historic epistle for the day, “As newborn babes...” 1 Peter 2:2.

the crucifixion or the birth of Jesus, or the birth and death of any man, woman or child. He was, and then to their grief he was no more, and then to their joy he was once again, alive and with them. He was speaking and smiling and talking and eating and drinking with them.

And he had a message: “Peace be with you.” Just two words in Greek, this is a blessing. This is the real peace of conscience, of trust in God. It is spiritual peace. The opposite is a disturbance, a troubled conscience, and the lack or absence of trust in God. The penalty of a bad conscience is described in the first Psalm: “It is like the chaff that the wind blows away.”² And the Lord told Moses: “I will make them so afraid that the sound of a windblown leaf will start them running.”³

This is the fear that sin always brings with it. Whatever the sin might be: coveting, gossiping, cheating, a little hatred, or lusting for whatever we don’t have but think or imagine that we deserve. The failure, finally, to submit to God’s will, the unwillingness to be subordinate to God. The desire we have to tell God how he could be doing a better job. What more sinful servants could he have than us? Than me? These attitudes we have, this pattern of thinking we know better than God does, should bring us fear.

The Christian understands that he has been saved, but then he is led down a new little path by a hissing voice that says, “If you’re saved, then don’t worry so much about this new sin.” The devil always wants us to try out a rebellion. New or old, innovative or one of the standards of lifelong sinful habit, he doesn’t care. And then there are fears.

There is the fear of hell. The Scriptures paint a terrible picture of hell, a place of eternal suffering without relief, without companionship or friendship, a suffering that is endured all alone, in pain, unrelenting pain and thirst so very like what Jesus experienced on the cross.

And then the sinner is led to understand: If I don’t turn away from this path of repeated sin that I’m on, I also know that God may call me back to repentance through trouble in my life. Like the disciples’ fear of the Jewish leaders. Or fear that God might bring disease or death or upheaval into one’s life. What if God would allow a woman’s reputation to be ruined for the rest of her life in order that the one solitary good might be accomplished; for there is one single good that outdoes every possible evil that might happen in life. That one good is the turning of a human being away from sin, doubt, mistrust, to live a life for Christ, to trust in him, have faith in him, and to turn away from sins of habit and convenience and to whisper the words of Jesus as our own: “Not my will, but your will be done.”

² Psalm 1:4

³ Leviticus 26:36

And so he comes. The Lord Jesus comes in the miracle of the locked door to the disciples and through the miracles of baptism and his body's real presence in the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of our sins, to turn us again to faith in him, from death to life.

Notice how he offers proof: Ten pairs of eyes are told to look at his hands and his side, and in another Gospel account, his feet. For a while, critics of the Bible denied that Jesus could have been nailed through the feet, and there were even some famous paintings of the crucifixion that have the feet of the Lord and the criminals dangling even though the Scriptures mention his feet in connection with the cross, but then archaeologists found a human foot bone with a nail driven through it from Roman times, and the critics had to look for some other way to cast doubt on the Bible, just as the High Priest looked for and bribed for a way.

The peace Jesus offers is offered to all. Believers have it, knowing that our sins are covered. Those who saw him in person have it, based on their own personal eyewitness. When we rise from the dead on the Last Day, we will still have it, and we will possess it flawlessly and forever.

- The grace of God sent Jesus to pay the penalty for each one of our sins.
- The grace of God sent faith into our hearts through the working of the Holy Spirit.
- The grace of God works through his Law and Gospel to turn us from sin and back to faith in Jesus.

You, righteous believer, you have peace with God even while you have affliction in the world, because you live in the Spirit and the Spirit lives in you.

The unrighteous man may seem to have peace with the world, but he has only affliction and trouble from God, because he lives in the flesh and not in the Spirit.

As the Spirit is eternal, there will be peace for the righteous, the believers and trouble for the unrighteous.

But the flesh by itself is temporal and so the troubles of the righteous will be brief, and the peace of the unrighteous will be brief.

For our true peace is eternal. Christ has given us true peace forever with his own blood. Believe in Jesus, trust in his forgiveness, and live in his everlasting peace. Amen.