

## Resurrected Peace (Series: Living on the Resurrected Side of Life)

John 20:19-23

The message I want to share with you today is contained in an ancient liturgy of the Church. We call it the passing of the peace. “The Peace of Christ be with you.” “And also with you.” It is the peace of God which passes all understanding that I want to offer you today.

By evening on Easter Sunday, I found myself tired, pleased, satisfied, and at peace, that we had shared a great day of worship together. The disciples come to their first Easter evening, afraid, anxious, and locked behind closed doors.

Somebody said the mind has a world of its own and can make a hell of heaven or a heaven of hell. Books promising peace of mind are some of the best-selling books on the market today. We live in a world of fear.

Fear haunts us in the night. Fear stalks us in the day. We have become a people of fear. We are terrified of violence, afraid of strangers, worried about the future, and uncertain about the economy. We know what it is to be afraid. We conquer our fears by facing them. Just as you prevent an accident by steering into the slide, so you overcome fears by tackling them head on.

Oh, that today, this very moment, the risen Christ would break through our walls of isolation and speak a word of peace. Fear imprisons and faith liberates. Fear paralyzes and faith empowers. Fear disheartens and faith encourages. Fear sickens and faith heals.

“And Jesus said again to them, ‘Peace be with you.’” I might have addressed the disciples differently at this first meeting following the crucifixion. I might have said, “What Happened?” “Where were you?” “I warned you ahead of time, why did you mess up?”

Jesus did not come to accuse; He came to invite. No matter who you are, what you’ve done, whoever you’ve betrayed, or let down, or how far you have roamed away from your true home, “Peace be with you.” Wouldn’t you like to hear those words today?

Garrison Keillor says, “We always have a backstage view of ourselves. We let the audience see only the neatly arranged stage, but behind the curtain all kinds of things are lying around – old failures, old hurts, old guilt, and old shame.

Into this world of pain, Jesus comes offering forgiveness. Forgiveness is God’s remedy to a past that even he cannot change. Forgiveness is a gift given for the purpose of sharing it with others. If you forgive anyone their sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. Herein lies the yin and yang of forgiveness. Forgiveness starts a chain reaction.

Did you ever get a chain letter that threatens you with your life if you fail to pass it on? Personally, I’m not into that kind of letter and I never pass one on. However, I am into that kind of forgiveness. Pass it on.

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” It’s what makes the world go around. That’s why we need to pray it often.

And he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Let the Holy Spirit form a sentinel around your heart and guard your heart. Hearts can be broken, betrayed, abandoned, and hurt. Let the Holy Spirit heal the wounds of your soul and make you whole.

The tragedy of the church is that we have turned our peace-making duties over to the government. When it comes to peace, we are democrats or republicans, but few of us are Christian. We have subverted our Christian identity to our national identity, thereby reducing peace-making to a political debate. We take our gospel from the news media, not the Bible. So, we find ourselves in a threatening world and a severely divided country. Maybe it's time for Christians to find some higher ground. Christians number about 2.2 billion people in the world. In places like Africa, Korea and parts of South America the Church is experiencing unprecedented growth. Who are these people called Christians and what are we about?

We are a trans-national, trans-racial, trans-linguistic global people of God who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We believe that God has chosen the Church through which to act in the world. Therefore, we are called to make disciples of Jesus Christ from every tribe, tongue, and nation of the world.

Christians are citizens of the kingdom of heaven which was established on earth through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and over which Christ shall reign forever.

The core ethic of the Christian faith is love, love for God, love for one another, love for all God's children, including love for our enemies. This love is expressed in the world through acts of peace and justice and deeds of service and ministry to the least of these.

We pray for God's kingdom to come on earth and pledge ourselves to work tirelessly toward this goal. What would happen if we who call ourselves Christian became what we call ourselves?

The German Theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg once said, "The evidence of Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things. First, it is a very unusual event; and secondly, if you believe it happened, you must change the way you live."

"The Peace of Christ be with you."

"And also with you."

Amen.