

# Peace Be With You

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[ 0 : 00 ] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 30th of April 2000. The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled Peace Be With You and is from John chapter 20 verses 19 to 23.

Peace with honour. But the millions of graves from World War II tell us that he was terribly wrong. Peace was pricey then as well. On Easter evening, the disciples of Jesus were in a locked room. They were afraid of the Jews. Maybe they were afraid because the body had disappeared. Maybe they feared a backlash from the Jewish, even Roman authorities, thinking that they might be accused of having stolen the body.

Even though they'd been told by this stage that Jesus was risen, they were fearful, no doubt confused. And then into the midst of this room that was locked appears Jesus.

[ 1 : 14 ] And he says to them, Peace be with you. Not a casual greeting.

Jesus is not saying, G'day, it's good to be back with you. It's not a liturgical greeting. He wasn't waiting for them to respond and also with you. But nor are they cheap words of peace. Because the very next thing that Jesus does is to show his hands and his side, bearing the scars of crucifixion still. On Maundy Thursday night, three nights earlier, on the night before he died, Jesus had promised his disciples that after he'd gone, he would be back and they would see him. And the disciples see him here. They see his scarred side and hands. Jesus, you may remember just on that Thursday night, as we saw a few weeks ago in our sermon, had said, I will not leave you orphaned.

I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. And now he delivers on that promise just three days later.

[ 2 : 42 ] They see him. And he is alive. But he's also saying to them, not just see that I'm alive, see the high price for peace that was paid.

He's walked in. His words have only been, peace be with you. And then to show the price for that peace, he shows them the scars in his side and hands.

This is a higher price than all the Gallipoli graves put together. This is a greater cost than all the blood spilled in Flanders. These are scars of battle more expensive than all those from the song. For this is the ultimate sacrifice. The death of God's unique and perfect son. On that Maundy Thursday night, the night before he died, Jesus also promised his disciples that he would give them peace.

So he said to them, as we saw just a few weeks ago in the sermons, peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.

[ 3 : 59 ] I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid. And then at the end of that address to his disciples, immediately before praying and going out to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' words were, I have said this to you so that in me you may have peace.

In the world you face persecution. But take courage. I have overcome the world. Jesus stands in this locked room with fearful disciples, saying to them, peace be with you.

No longer do you need to have a locked room. No longer do you need to be afraid. For the peace of God is with you in me. No longer do you need such fear and insecurity.

Jesus is saying to his disciples here that he has secured for them peace with God that far transcends and outpasses any need for fear from anything this world has to offer.

And standing there he delivers on the promise that he'd made three nights before. Peace now is theirs. Bought at a price. The price of his life as the scars bear witness.

[ 5 : 28 ] What does this mean for us? Peace means that we need not fear the world. Our world, and for the last thousands of years, has had significant anti-Christian forces.

They're vast. They're strong. In our society, I think they're becoming more explicit. In Friday's Age, for example, there was a very repugnant article mocking Christian faith.

It began by saying, Christians don't read this because I'm going to mock you, in effect. It was disgusting. In other articles in The Age this week, Bible-believing Christians are sidelined and marginalised as being just very extreme right fundamentalists that we should ignore.

But despite what the world says, despite the trends of our society, despite the opposition sometimes ridicule that we face as Christians and our children face in schools as Christians, is that we need not fear.

Whatever our world might throw up at us, vicious, sometimes subtle other, we have peace with God and that cannot be taken away.

[ 6 : 47 ] They may take away, in some situations of the world, Christians' lives, their homes, their families, their wives, their goods, their livelihood. But never can anybody in this world take away from us the peace with God that Jesus has secured for us.

We have peace with God. bought at the price of Jesus' death, demonstrated by his risenness, and no one can take that away.

Yes, Christians are called to oppose the anti-Christian forces in our society, to make a stand against them and for God. But we need not fear them, or anybody else, because of where we stand with God in peace.

A second implication of this is that our guilt is dealt with. If God has offered us peace, we are right with God.

We belong to him. We're in a relationship that is positive with him. But notice that Jesus is declaring peace that his death has brought. That is, it is God who has established peace with us.

[ 7 : 59 ] It is us who have caused ourselves to be enemies of God through our sin. So when Jesus declares to his followers, you have peace with God, he's saying, your sin has been dealt with.

My death has been an effective sacrifice to take away the sins of the world, as John's Gospels made clear various times. Enmity with God has been overturned by Jesus' death on the cross.

Too many Christians are fearful of God. Too many Christians harbour guilt that cripples their faith.

Too many Christians fear that they're not right with God, that they're not good enough for God, that he doesn't really care for them or love them.

But Jesus' words of peace and what his death and resurrection show for us is that we are at peace with God through faith in Christ's death and resurrection.

[ 9 : 07 ] That God does love us. That we have no need to be fearful of him. That we can have confidence and assurance as we approach his throne of grace. My dear brothers and sisters, God is at peace with you and you've received that through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus' resurrection declares that peace and his death is what procures it for us. So be reassured with God. Be confident with God.

For the grounds of approaching him are certain and sure. Jesus' death and resurrection. Nothing we can do can make peace with God even though we're the ones who caused the enmity in the first place.

It doesn't matter what I do or say or how I change my life. That's not going to create peace with God. It's being done for us by Jesus and we accept it through faith.

A third implication of this offer of peace is that it brings great joy. When the disciples saw the hands and the side they rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

[ 10 : 26 ] On the night before he died on Maundy Thursday night Jesus had said to his disciples in the upper room You have pain now but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice and no one will take that joy from you.

And here Jesus delivers that promise. They are joyful. They rejoice. The joy that's being spoken of here is not a superficial smiley happy effervescent personality.

The bubbly sort of it's alright Jack it'll be better tomorrow the sun will shine and so on type personality. This is an abiding enduring deep seated joy in God and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There are plenty of things of course in life to make us despondent plenty of things to make us sad or gloomy or depressed. The rain or maybe too much sun illness poverty death bereavement work lack of work family children parents the list goes on and on.

There are all sorts of circumstances that are thrown up at us that make us feel down at times. Jesus is promising and giving to his disciples here a joy that far outweighs the bad things of this life.

[ 12 : 03 ] A joy that even the bad things of this life cannot undo or take away. A joy that will endure in the midst of pain or sorrow or grief or hardship or depression.

it's a joy that our world cannot take from us. It is to be deep in the inner being of Christian people to endure whatever circumstances we face.

Jesus has overcome the world therefore our joy is abiding and lasting. there are many stories of Christians who are far worse off than we are.

Christians who've lost their lives for their Christian faith. And from time to time we hear stories of such people whose joy in God in the face of death and martyrdom is significant and obvious.

Whether it's a young Russian girl persecuted by the KGB for being a Christian whose joy at being beat not at being beaten but joy in the midst of being beaten was such a powerful witness that one of her KGB persecutors was converted to Christ.

[ 13 : 20 ] Or maybe some of those Christian martyrs in the Roman Empire who with radiant joy in God and the resurrection of Jesus face their death whether by lions or some other brutal way.

Or the reformers in the 16th century in England who were burnt at the stake who stood there announcing their joy in the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the face of their own martyrdom.

Or Christian prisoners of war in Japan who in the midst of depraved and deprived circumstances testified with radiant joy to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his victory over this world.

that's the sort of joy that is to be ours day by day hour by hour minute by minute. It's not to deny the bad things of life not to deny the grief and sorrow and hardship of life but it's to say that in the eternal scales of balance the joy in the resurrection of Jesus weighs much heavier than the sorrows of this day and age.

that's what this peace that Jesus offers is all about. No more fear no need to harbour guilt and joy that abides and lasts.

[ 14 : 45 ] But the peace that Jesus offers his disciples here is not just for their benefit rather he says to them peace be with you as the father has sent me so I send you.

The followers of Jesus here are to continue his mission to the world as he was sent by the father to the world so they continue the same mission to the world of the same gospel for the world.

Doesn't mean that they'll die on a cross for the world like Jesus doesn't necessarily mean they'll perform the miracles of Jesus or speak with the same inherent authority as Jesus but the same gospel that Jesus died for is the mission of his followers to this world.

They are to be witnesses to him and notice that they are sent having been offered and given that peace. There's no point sending them before they have peace through the death and resurrection of Jesus their fear would cripple them and stifle them and they'd be dumb but knowing God's peace they have no alternative but to go to the world on the night again before he died in his words to the disciples Jesus had promised them that when he goes he would give them another helper to be with them in the world so he said to those disciples I will ask the father and he will give you another advocate to be with you forever this is the spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him you know him because he abides with you and he will be in you and now again

Jesus delivers on that promise for in the next verse 22 when he'd said these words he breathed on them and said to them receive the Holy Spirit now it may be that then and there these disciples actually receive God's powerful spirit inside of them but it may also be that this is a symbolic gesture anticipating in just seven weeks time the day of Pentecost when God's powerful spirit was poured out on all Jesus disciples and they preached and prophesied with power in Jerusalem on that day maybe they received the spirit here maybe this is a sign of what's going to happen in a few weeks time but either way the significance of what's being said here and done here is that Jesus is giving them his own divine resources for their mission to the world he's not leaving them to fend for themselves as they go out sent into the world to proclaim the gospel but rather they're given power from God's own spirit and a reassurance of

[ 17 : 33 ] Jesus ongoing presence but we should also note that what's being promised here for the disciples is not unique to them either for the gift of God's spirit is for all Christian people as the New Testament makes very clear this is not setting apart special disciples here but all Christians receive God's spirit and are sent into the world in the same sort of way sometimes and especially it seems in recent years there's been a growing quest for spiritual experience in our world people are

wanting to feel something of the spirit now people look in all sorts of different places for that sometimes they're not expecting a Christian spirit but the quest for spirituality must not be divorced from missionary enterprise that is authentic Christian spirituality or spiritual experience is necessarily mission minded the gift of the spirit here and in the New Testament as a whole is for the purpose of witnessing to the world ultimately in various ways for those who are seeking some spiritual experience from God but are not prepared to testify to the truths of God in this world then your quest for a spiritual experience is flawed and may not indeed be met by God

God's spirit is given not for some experience but for the sake of the world as these words and actions demonstrate Jesus describes the mission of the disciples in the final words of the paragraph if you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them if you retain the sins of any they are retained these words have been misunderstood by various traditions over the last two thousand years Jesus is not talking about an individual priestly absolution of a sinner who comes to a wooden box and hears some words from some priest inside declaring their forgiveness or non-forgiveness rather it's talking about groups of people not individual but also the words as written make it clear that it's not the disciple or the follower of Jesus who has the power to forgive or to retain the sins if you forgive the sins of any the effect the force of the next words are they're actually already been forgiven and not by you the implication is that it's by God that is the disciples here are called to a ministry of the gospel to preach the gospel and call hearers to repent and believe in it and for those who repent of their sins there can be a declaration that sins are forgiven for those who don't there can't be their sins are retained but it's actually God who does the forgiving and

God who does the retaining what the disciples then are called to as a mission here is a mission of preaching the gospel it's a mission that will have two results some will hear with faith and respond and their sins are forgiven but others will not respond with faith and their sins will not be forgiven and in that it's continuing Jesus' own ministry of course take for example John chapter 9 which we looked at some weeks ago Jesus heals a blind man at the end of the chapter he makes it clear that the blind have been given their sight but those Jewish leaders who are without faith think they've got sight but actually they're blind that is there are two results to Jesus' ministry in that chapter some come to faith and see and those who think they can see are actually find that they're not forgiven it's the same sort of effect for the preacher of the gospel today notice that it is the giving of the spirit that enables and empowers the preaching of that gospel and again on the night before he died

Jesus promised his disciples not only that he would give them the Holy Spirit but that when the spirit comes to them he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment that is it's a mission of the gospel in the preaching of the gospel the world will be found wrong about those issues of sin and judgment and righteousness for those who repent and have faith sins are forgiven for those who don't they won't be and here Jesus delivers on that promise as well on the night before he died in the upper room after the last supper in his last words to his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion Jesus promised them lots of different things on the night before he died Jesus promised his disciples that after he's gone he would come back and they would see him and here they do on the night before he died Jesus promised his disciples peace and here he gives them peace on the night before he died Jesus promised them that their grief would give way to joy and here we see that promise fulfilled on the night before he died Jesus promised to reassure them in the midst of their own fear and here he does just that on the night before he died Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit and here they receive that same Spirit on the night before he died Jesus promised that he would send them empowered into the world and here he does just that all that he promised he fulfills and he keeps and at the heart of Jesus keeping those promises is the fact that he died and is truly risen from the dead it's the same

[ 24 : 02 ] Jesus who died who is risen his side and his hands testify to that it's not a ghost it's not an illusion they're not drunk it's not an hallucination it's the real Jesus who has appeared with the real wounds of his death in that closed room some people in the age this week have suggested that that sort of doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Jesus is a doctrine for hardline fundamentalists only they're wrong it is core belief for Christian people if you don't believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus you are not a Christian it is as simple as that and even the new primate for all the various things that he doesn't believe sadly it seems that he actually does believe that Jesus rose from the dead but if Jesus wasn't truly risen then none of those promises are kept the disciples would be left in their fear left in a locked room without peace without joy without reassurance without guilt

forgiven but Jesus was risen he is risen and we can have peace and joy and forgiveness and power to witness to this world let's pray

O God from whom all holy desires all good counsels and all just works do proceed give unto your servants that peace which the world cannot give that both our hearts may be set to obey your commandments and also that by you we being defended from the fear of our enemies may pass our time in rest and quietness through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour Amen