

PEACE.

Text: John 20:19–31

Other Lessons: Acts 5:29–42; Psalm 148; 1 Peter 1:3–9

Goal: That hearers more firmly see in Jesus' resurrection the assurance that they have peace with God and forgiveness of their sins, so reconciled, they are forever in his care.

This Gospel is a richly woven tapestry that derives its richness from inter-related threads. For example:

- In the Prologue, John declared, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made" (1:1-3). Now Thomas addresses Jesus as "My Lord and my God" (v. 28), reaffirming Jesus' deity. This Gospel is framed by these beginning and ending statements about the deity of Jesus.
- Jesus promised the disciples, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (14:18). Now he returns after his resurrection to those who feel orphaned by the crucifixion.
- In that same discourse he said, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, give I to you. Don't let your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful" (14:27). Now coming into the presence of the disciples, his first words to them are, "Peace be to you!" (v. 19). He repeats this giving of peace a week later when he meets again with the disciples and Thomas (v. 26).
- In his prayer shortly before his death, Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, so that your Son may also glorify you" (17:1). Now Jesus has been glorified on the cross and appears as the risen Savior to the disciples.

The two appearances of Jesus take place a week apart, the first being on Easter evening and the second being after eight days often translated "a week later".

Jesus speaks to the disciples three times. "Each time his words give power to the disciples who hear them".

- "Peace be to you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (vv. 19, 21).
- "Receive the Holy Spirit! If you forgive anyone's sins, they have been forgiven them. If you retain anyone's sins, they have been retained" (vv. 22-23).
- "Reach here your finger, and see my hands. Reach here your hand, and put it into my side. Don't be unbelieving, but believing" (v. 27).

The word *peace* can take us off in a lot of directions, can't it? It's a very rich concept, especially in the Bible. I was reading a study this week on the word *peace* as it's used in the Scriptures. Listen to some

of the words the Bible associates with peace? Reconciliation, relationship, presence of God, well-being, contentedness, salvation, redemption, wholeness, cross, joyful assurance, gift of God, new creation

This Gospel shows us that there are different kinds of faith, and that faith comes in different ways and with differing intensities to different people. The beloved disciple believes upon seeing the empty tomb (v. 8). Mary believes when the Lord calls her name (v. 16). The disciples must see the risen Lord (v. 20). Thomas says that he must touch Jesus' wounds (v. 25)—although that need seems to evaporate once he sees the risen Christ (v. 28). People have differing needs and find various routes to faith. It is instructive to note that Thomas believed, lost faith, and then returned to even greater faith.

Do you suppose such a broad concept can be tied together with a common thread? I think so. In our text for this Second Sunday of Easter, two appearances of the risen Lord to his disciples, Jesus uses the word *peace* three times. I think in each he's speaking a word of forgiveness. I believe the common bond that ties all three of these together, is what we might call

The Bond of Peace, Is Forgiveness.

- I. The first time Jesus speaks the word *peace*: forgiveness gives peace from fear.
 - A. Peace must include freedom from fear.
 1. Some of those words associated with peace: salvation, joyful assurance, presence of God—the very opposite of fear.
 2. People living in terror—of suicide bombers, of test results from their doctor, of an angry God—aren't at peace.
 3. Ask most folks why peace is better than war, and the answer will be something to the effect that nobody gets killed by peace; nobody's afraid of peace.
 - B. There was no peace for the disciples after Good Friday; they were fearful(v 19a)!
 1. All of them had left Jesus in fear, especially Peter.
 2. They were deathly afraid the Jews would come for them too. That's why the doors were locked.
 3. Worse, they now had no leader to make them feel secure.
 - C. What sort of fear upsets our peace?
The fear of the unknown? The unseen dangers in life?
 1. Is it fear of death—our own from illness? the daily danger of a loved one who's serving overseas?
 2. Is it fear that some hidden sin might be discovered—by our parents, by our spouses?
 3. Is it fear for our jobs—of losing them or failing at them?
 4. Is it fear of school—of the bully on the playground? of finishing your science fair project on time? of the turndown letter that might come from a college any day?
 - D. Christ returned from death to give peace from fear; suddenly he “stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’ ” (v 19b).
 1. For Jesus' reappearance to give peace from fear, there had to be forgiveness. Remember, the disciples had left Jesus. Now that he was alive—and more powerful even than death—he might be angry; he might have come back for the very purpose of taking revenge on his deserters, his triple denier. More than the Jews, Jesus was the one they really had to fear.
 2. Instead, Jesus greets them with—“**Peace be with you.**” This was absolution, clear and simple, Jesus' declaration of forgiveness for deserting him, denying him. All was forgiven Jesus came in peace, not in vengeance.

- E. The result: peace from fear.
 1. The disciples rejoiced (v 20). Their relationship with Jesus was restored. They had their leader back. He wasn't angry with them. They had nothing to fear.
 2. We can rejoice too. We have nothing to fear if Christ isn't angry with us. Our desertions—including those secret sins—are forgiven. The one who conquered death is with us to deliver us—maybe from death, certainly through death. The one who now rules all things for his Church will protect us, provide for us, support us. The one who couldn't be kept out by a locked door will open new doors for us if some seem to close. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31).
- II. The second time Jesus speaks the word *peace*: forgiveness brings peace from helplessness.
 - A. Peace can't be just oblivion, idleness, or numbness.
 1. Eastern mysticism sees peace that way, like a Hindu Brahman in meditation.
 2. But ask any retiree if, after a few months, sitting on the couch flipping channels for the next twenty-five years still sounds peaceful, and you're likely to get a different answer.
 3. No, peace is more like some of those other words: relationship, reconciliation, cross.
 - B. The disciples felt no peace as long as they were sitting idly by.
 1. They were helpless, numb, paralyzed by Jesus' death.
 2. They were the prime recruits to take Jesus' kingdom to the world, but there they sat in that locked room.
 3. This wasn't peace, but turmoil, a rush of conflicting thoughts running through their heads and nothing else on which to focus.
 - C. We may sometimes feel numb, helpless, or unable to fulfill our purpose.
 1. There's a whole world out there that needs Jesus' peace, and we want to share it.
 2. But what do we do, and how to do it? Our own consciences nag at us, and that's no peace.
 - D. Fortunately, Christ gave his disciples peace by making them sharers of forgiveness: "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you'" (v 21).
 1. This peace was Jesus' way of saying these idlers were still precious—and useful—to him.
 2. Jesus' word of peace was their forgiveness, and now they had the power to share that same forgiveness with the world (vv 22–23).
 - E. The result: peace from helplessness.
 1. We're no longer helpless; we have the forgiveness Christ earned on the cross and gave to us by his word of peace to announce to everyone we meet.
 2. All whom we absolve have peace from their own helplessness, from the paralysis of their sin, as surely as if Jesus himself absolved them.
- III. The third time Jesus speaks the word *peace*: forgiveness means peace from doubts and unbelief.
 - A. A few more of those words associated with peace: contentedness, wholeness, well-being.
 1. These are the very opposites of doubt and unbelief.
 2. Doubt means internal conflict; unbelief requires finding something to make one whole, content.
 - B. That's where Thomas was for a terrible week (vv 24–25).
 1. Imagine the emptiness, the void.
 2. While his brothers were rejoicing, his unbelief gave him no peace.
 - C. We understand Thomas, don't we?
 1. We believe Jesus died and rose and even that he's given us eternal life in heaven someday.

2. But do we really, always, believe that because my Redeemer lives, he grants me rich supply, guides me with his eye, will silence all my fears, will wipe away my tears (see *LSB* 461) today, tomorrow, on Thursday?
 3. Or do our doubts leave us with no peace?
- D. Well, Christ returned to Thomas to bring him peace: “Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you’ ” (v 26).
1. Jesus forgave Thomas’s unbelief (v 27).
 2. He returned to make Thomas whole, to give him the contentedness of faith.
- E. The result: peace from unbelief and doubts.
1. Thomas confessed with joy, “My Lord and my God!” (v 28).
 2. We can be content, whole in faith just as surely as Thomas(vv 29–31). Christ has forgiven our doubts and unbelief, and he keeps coming back to us with his Word of the Gospel and the Sacraments that we can see and taste and touch. In them we always have forgiveness, peace with God.

Conclusion: So what do you think? Is forgiveness the common bond that ties all of these concepts of peace together? True peace, as the Bible describes it, is always a product of the restored relationship between God and man, and that is only a result of the forgiveness that Christ earned for us on the cross. It might be useful for all of us to do a little word associating with the word *peace*, consider all the ways and all the situations we’d like to experience peace in our lives—in our homes, in our minds, in our friendships, in our relationship with God. And then consider how the forgiveness of Christ, earned on Good Friday, declared on Easter, is the key. AMEN!!!