

“Our Real Easter Gift”¹
John 21:19-21²
Easter 2nd Sunday – May 1, 2011
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The Gospel accounts of Easter are all familiar to most of us. We know, the women went to the tomb with the intent of finishing the burial process for Jesus. We know their shock and surprise, finding the tomb empty. We have heard repeatedly the angelic words, **“He is not here, He has risen, as He said.”³** And we are well aware, the disciples did not believe the report of the women.⁴

Two of the disciples, Luke tells us, had left Jerusalem that afternoon, and were headed toward their home in Emmaus. We will consider their experience next Sunday. By evening, perhaps 6:00 or 7:00, they were back in Jerusalem, explaining to the others their personal encounter with Jesus. Again, no one would believe them.

Of all the pages in the Bible, the initial aftermath of the resurrection may be the most pitiful. For all intents and purposes, the disciples had lost their faith in Jesus.

Now, listen to the first word of our Gospel reading for today: **Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”⁵**

¹ PR: CP1:75

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³ See Luke 24:6

⁴ Luke 24:11

⁵ John 21:19

I. What Gift Is This?

This was not a perfunctory greeting. Coming from the lips of the risen Jesus, these words conveyed the ultimate Easter gift to those living in the greatest need of that gift. ***“Peace be with you.”*** This is more than just words.

This was the one of whom Isaiah prophesied: ***“...his name shall be called ... Prince of Peace.”***⁶ This is the one who said to the disciples, only three evenings earlier: ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”***⁷

Some years later, the Apostle Paul would write of Him: ***“He himself is our peace...”***⁸ Jesus, speaking, alive and well, is the one hailed by the prophets, extolled by the psalmist, proclaimed by the angels.

This peace which Jesus was giving them, (this peace which He gives to us every day) is unlike any peace this world may know, for this is spiritual peace, peace of heart and mind. This is peace with God, because this is the peace of God.

This spiritual peace is so unique, so complete, that Scripture gives us literally dozens of examples of this peace at work. In Romans we read: ***“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”***⁹ This peace is given to people who understand the curse which their sins have brought. Paul discussed this

⁶ Isaiah 9:6b

⁷ John 14:27

⁸ Ephesians 2:14

⁹ Romans 5:1

when he wrote: ***“...remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”***¹⁰ That is in our background, in our past. Now we have ***“...put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.”***¹¹ Did you hear that?

The gospel brings us this peace, ***“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”***¹² All this because: ***“In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”***¹³ [He was] ***“...making peace by the blood of his cross.”***¹⁴

Isn't our faith a wonderful thing! We have peace *with* God, at the same time, we have the peace *of* God. This is: ***“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.”***¹⁵ Paul encourages the Colossians: ***“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”***¹⁶

It truly bothers me when I hear pastors preaching messages (especially Christmas or Easter messages) that offer the listener no divine peace. I listened to a portion of the message our President heard on Easter morning. I felt sorry for him and all who were there. They heard nothing that bore witness to the Savior, no good news, no hope, no joy, no peace.

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:12

¹¹ Ephesians 6:15b

¹² Romans 5:10

¹³ 2 Corinthians 5:19

¹⁴ Colossians 1:20

¹⁵ Philippians 4:7

¹⁶ Colossians 3:15

The peace which God gives is not found in the politics or the reasonings of this world.

The peace which our Lord gives is supernatural. Martin Luther correctly said: ***“This is the difference between worldly and spiritual peace. Worldly peace consists in removing the external evil which is creating the unrest. For instance, there is no peace when enemies lie before a city, but when they are gone, peace returns. So also in poverty or sickness. Because these press upon you, you are not at peace; but when they go away and you are rid of the misfortune, outward peace and quiet return. ... “But Christian or spiritual peace works just the opposite way, so that outwardly the misfortune remains. Enemies, sickness, poverty, sin, devil, and death are there; they do not stop but completely encircle the believer. Yet he has peace within, strength and comfort in his heart. Therefore the heart pays no attention to the misfortune, nay, is more spirited and joyful when it is there than when it is not. That is why this peace is called the peace that exceeds reason and all the senses, for reason can comprehend no peace except a worldly or external one.”***¹⁷

This is exactly what Jesus meant when He said: ***“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”***¹⁸ The peace to which we cling, this supernatural peace which God would give us, allows us to hear our Savior as He says: ***“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”***¹⁹

¹⁷ “What Luther Says,” from paragraph 3284, volume 2, ©1959, CPH, page 1031-1032.

¹⁸ Philippians 4:6

¹⁹ Matthew 11:28

There is nothing more positive, more encouraging, or more necessary for our Christian lives than this divinely given peace.

II. How is this Gift Perfected for us?

How was this gift – this peace – created and perfected for us? Listen to our lesson for today. Immediately on the heels of announcing peace, what does Jesus do? ***When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.***

Five wounds, bearing testimony to the fiercest conflict. ***Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ... “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”²⁰*** Five wounds, the price required for our salvation. ***“[He] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”²¹*** Five wounds, and the Son of God established (for us and for all people) peace with God. Five wounds, and the great atonement was complete. ***“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”²²*** Five wounds, and now we confess, ***“He himself is our peace...”²³***

All this the Father sealed, when he broke the human seal on the tomb, rolled away the stone, and raised His one and only Son to life.

²⁰ Matthew 27:46

²¹ Titus 2:14

²² 1 Peter 2:24

²³ Ephesians 2:14

Dr. Luther, in his Easter Sermon in 1530 said: ***“Know then – sin, death, devil, and everything that assails me – that you are missing the mark. I am not one of those who are afraid of you. For Christ, my dear Lord, has presented to me that triumph and victory of His by which you were laid low. And from this very gift of His I derive my name and am called a Christian. There is no other reason. My sin and death hung about His neck on Good Friday, but on the day of Easter they had completely disappeared. This victory He has bestowed on me”***.²⁴

No sinner, no matter how bleak his record may be, is excluded from this peace. ***“He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”***²⁵

How wonderful our risen Savior is! How precious and priceless the peace He provides: ***We see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.***²⁶ And indeed He did. For all people Jesus died. For all people the Father raised Jesus from the dead. The peace He brings, He offers to you, to me, and to everyone who believes in Him.

There is so much more I could say on this topic, but for now, let me close with the words with which we began.

Jesus came and stood among them even as He is here among us. ***He said to them, “Peace be with you.”***²⁷ Amen.

²⁴ “What Luther Says,” vol. 3 article 3881, page 1218.

²⁵ 1 John 2:2

²⁶ Hebrews 2:9

²⁷ John 21:19