

Sermon: 2nd Sunday of Easter

Text: John 20:19-31

Theme: Peace be with you

Goal: To share Jesus' peace by His presence, by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the forgiveness of sins.

Dear Friends in the Resurrected Christ,

Introduction: We are still celebrating Easter! During the seven weeks between Easter and Pentecost we celebrate the Living Christ in a very special way! Certainly we celebrate Easter every Sunday, the First Day of the week when He rose again, the Day of the Lord! But now it is a very special season to be comforted by the appearances of the resurrected Jesus and by the words He said after His resurrection.

I – Peace be with you: I am alive!

The smell of death was still around the disciples. They couldn't forget the events of Good Friday and the image of their Friend Jesus dying on the cross. The women, and Peter and John, were at the tomb that morning; it was empty! What had happened to the body of Christ? Was He removed from there by someone? They couldn't remember the several occasions when Jesus had told them that it was necessary for Him to suffer, but He would rise again on the third day (Matthew 20:17-19). Death had blinded their minds and their hope...They were behind locked doors for fear of the Jewish authorities.

Then the living Christ appears to them! And the first words Jesus said to them are: "Peace be with you!" – It was not just the common greetings "Shalom" that the Jews use to greet each other till now, but these words have a broader sense. Death was over! To the frightened and hopeless disciples a new light began to shine! "Peace

be with you!” And they “were overjoyed when they saw the Lord!”
After death – life! After suffering – relief! – When thoughts of death disturb us and try to frighten us, look to the resurrected Jesus! Peace be with you!

II – Peace be with you: I am sending you!

This Good News has to be shared! Jesus was finishing His earthly ministry. He was sent by the Father at Christmas and was ready to go back to the Father on Ascension Day. He had prepared His disciples for three years by words and deeds to be His witnesses to the world. Now the time had come. “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” Some days after He would say to the same disciples: “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation... make disciples ...baptizing... and teaching...” (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19-20).

And the disciples went into the entire world in the peace of the Lord! We are fruits of their labour. They began to preach and to share the peace of the Lord in Jerusalem on Pentecost Day, and from there they went out to all Asia, they reached Europe, and they reached Africa.

“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

This command is still valid nowadays for us, Jesus’ disciples of the 21st Century. The church is not just an exclusive club for her members, but is an open door to receive everyone who is searching for the Lord. And we are called to go, to share the peace, and to gather God’s people into His family.

III – Peace be with you: Receive the Holy Spirit!

But Jesus didn’t send His disciples without giving them real condition to accomplish their task. He gave them power from high! He gave them the Holy Spirit! “He breathed on them and said: Receive the

Holy Spirit!” – He had promised the Holy Spirit several times to His disciples. “He said: “I will ask my Father, and He will give another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16).

“When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth... He will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27).

The disciples received the Holy Spirit in full measure on Pentecost Day. But on Easter Sunday evening Jesus wanted to assure His disciples that they would not be alone, but that the Holy Spirit would be with them, blessing their work. And He Himself gave them from His Holy Spirit.

IV – Peace be with you: Forgive sins!

The power of the Holy Spirit would enable the disciples to do something very special: To forgive sins! Something that only God can do was now delegated to the disciples as well. Why? Because Jesus had conquered forgiveness of sins to all by His blood shed on the cross. And Jesus shared with His disciples this power and this blessing of forgiveness: “Peace be with you! Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” - Jesus had all the authority (Matthew 28:18) to do it, because He had paid for all the sins on the cross. The disciples had to share the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice.

Martin Luther explains in the Small Catechism: *This is that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from unrepentant as long as they do not repent.* (The Office of the Keys).

When we are forgiven, we have peace with God. When we are not forgiven, we don’t have peace, but our sin burns inside us, as King David confesses in Psalm 32:3-5: “When I kept silent, my bones

wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.” And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

The church forgives sins through the Means of Grace: Through the Baptism, who is for remission of sins; through the Absolution (private or general) “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”; and through the Holy Supper, which is the body and blood of Jesus given and shed for remission of our sins.

By faith we receive the blessing of forgiveness that Jesus got for us on the cross. Luther wrote: *I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.* (The Office of the Keys). And this is only possible because we pastors work under Jesus’ command and blessing, as His mouth.

Conclusion: We share “The Peace of the Lord” just before we come to the Holy Communion: *The peace of the Lord be with you always*; because the peace with God brings peace among us as well. We cannot intend to be in peace with God if we are not in peace with our brothers and sisters. The resurrected Christ gives us His Holy Spirit to empower us to believe that we are forgiven and to forgive others as God forgives us. The *Peace of the Lord* is not just a part of the Liturgy, but it is something to be experienced and lived and shared.

May the peace of the living Christ, who sends us in peace to the world by the power of the Spirit of truth and peace, and gives us peace with God by the forgiveness of our sins, rule our minds and lives that we may please Him in words and deeds. - Peace be with you. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle – Cape Town, 3 April 2016 (Adapted)