

April 12, 2015

*John 20:19-23: **"Peace Be With You!"***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Everyone wants to have peace. We want peace within our homes, peace with our relatives, peace with our neighbors, peace within our borders, and peace with other countries. And why is that? Why do so many people want peace? Peace at home means no angry or bitter disagreement. Peace at school means everyone gets along with everyone else. Peace between nations means no more sending our military to war. Simply put, when there is peace life is better.

So if everybody wants peace so much, why does it seem that there is so little peace in the world and in our lives? Simply put, sin prevents there from being peace down here. Selfish desires get in the way that lead to all kinds of destructive actions that put an end to any hope of true and lasting peace in this fallen place. The door is locked because there is hostility and fear.

Regardless of the locked door, the hostility and fear, Jesus mysteriously appears and says to his disciples, "Peace be with you!" Before Jesus death and resurrection, he told the disciples: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth (Matthew 10:34)." In other words, there will always be trouble in homes, with neighbors, at our borders and with other countries as long as this messed up world remains. So, the peace that Jesus speaks to his disciples is quite different than what we might crave from an earthly standpoint. It is a peace that the apostle Paul talks about in Ephesians chapter two - a peace that binds Jews and Gentiles - all races in a unity with one another and God that is to last forever:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

Easter is about this kind of peace that ultimately leads to an everlasting kingdom. It is here that we are to understand that Jesus resurrection from the dead brings with it real and lasting peace - the most precious peace of all. It is peace with God, peace in our troubled consciences, a peace that is otherworldly, and for now, peace in the midst of strife. Berit Kjos in his book *A Wardrobe from the King* tells the following story:

Long ago a man sought the perfect picture of peace. Not finding one that satisfied, he announced a contest to produce this masterpiece. The challenge stirred the imagination of artists everywhere, and paintings arrived from far and wide. Finally the great day of revelation arrived. The judges uncovered one peaceful scene after another, while the viewers clapped and cheered. The tensions grew. Only two pictures remained veiled. As a judge pulled the cover from one, a hush fell over the crowd. A mirror-smooth lake reflected lacy, green birches under the soft blush of the evening sky. Along the grassy shore, a flock of sheep grazed undisturbed. Surely this was the winner. The man with the vision uncovered

the second painting himself, and the crowd gasped in surprise. Could this be peace? A tumultuous waterfall cascaded down a rocky precipice; the crowd could almost feel its cold, penetrating spray. Stormy-gray clouds threatened to explode with lightning, wind and rain. In the midst of the thundering noises and bitter chill, a spindly tree clung to the rocks at the edge of the falls. One of its branches reached out in front of the torrential waters as if foolishly seeking to experience its full power. A little bird had built a nest in the elbow of that branch. Content and undisturbed in her stormy surroundings, she rested on her eggs. With her eyes closed and her wings ready to cover her little ones, she manifested peace that transcends all earthly turmoil.

As long as we remain down here, peace is not about stopping the storm, its about finding security in the midst of a our storms; being at peace, or having inner peace, even while around us, troubles and despair reign down. Jesus' disciples had just endured a very severe personal storm in their lives and were about to face another one. They were with Jesus when he was arrested, they endured the death of their dear friend and teacher, they were now processing the news of resurrection, and they were gathered together behind closed doors, in what they thought was a place of safety; a place they had run to, in the hope it would give them some peace from the ongoing turmoil.

Despite removing themselves from the storm, inside their hearts fear deprived them of the peace they so desperately needed; fear they would be found by the enemies; fear of what were the religious leaders were going to do; fear they would be arrested; fear of life without hope, stripped them of any peace. We can understand their thinking as we see a unbelieving world focus their attention on Christians.

This same desire for peace is going on in each and every one of us. You and I are not exempt from life's storms, and neither is anyone else. Every one of us has our own storm to endure; personal hardship which causes restlessness and despair, but even more than this, the storm of sin and death. We, like the disciples, often try to shut ourselves in to avoid our storm and personal problems, by going to a place of our own making where we hope for peace and quite. We hide our emotions, our true feelings, our worst fears, behind the closed doors of whatever we can find, only to find that they don't do the trick.

Peace, true peace which passes all understanding, is only found in the one who can bring peace in the midst of a storm; is only found in the one who comes to us, into our hiding places, into our hearts and to say "peace be with you." And that person is the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And the word he speaks is not a word that says "I will stop all the storms on earth." Rather, he says "I forgive your sins." And with that forgiveness of sins, he promises a future where there will no longer be anymore storms - in a new and better place.

Easter peace for our troubled conscience is this: "As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us (Ps 103:12)." Also the prophet Micah speaks of Easter peace when he writes, "You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19)." The Lord Himself gives peace to our trouble conscience when He says in Isaiah, "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins." (Is 43:25) The God who knows all things and

remembers all things, has forgotten our sins. All this is assured to us when the risen Savior Jesus shows us His hands and His side. Easter peace is this: "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus!"

Peace. The world is looking for it, but it is looking for it in all the wrong places. True peace, lasting peace cannot be found apart from Jesus' death and resurrection - because only Jesus death and resurrection removes that which hinders true peace - sin. This Easter peace is the peace which Paul speaks of, "The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil 4:7)."

Yes, like the bird that build her nest in the branch, we build our nest in the beam of the cross. The extent of this peace of God is greater than we can even begin to understand. It is a nest in the beam of the cross on the rock of Calvary. No storms will sweep it away. This Easter peace guards our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus despite all the storms, and especially the storms of death and hell. This is the peace of Easter. Peace between God and us. Peace for our troubled conscience. And the peace that we want to proclaim throughout all the world. Praise be to Jesus for securing such peace for us through His death and resurrection!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott