

## Homily for Easter 2, 2021

John 20:19-31

*'Peace be with you'*

*Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer*

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### TEXT – John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, **'Peace be with you.'** <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, **'Peace be with you.** As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, **'Peace be with you.'** <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

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### INTRODUCTION

I remember as a child how exciting it was when someone close to me returned from a trip away, because they would often bring back gifts.

My absolute favourite thing was when dad would take a flight somewhere, because he would sometimes bring us back a little bag of peanuts from the plane, for some reason that was very exciting as a child!

This is a custom with which many of you would be familiar.

A person goes on a journey,  
They buy souvenirs or gifts to give to those they love.

During Holy Week we have heard again the journey of our Lord Jesus Christ into death and the grave,  
Followed by his glorious resurrection.

And now after his resurrection as he appears to his disciples,

Jesus is in the gift-giving mode,

And there is one particular gift he wants to give over and over again,

And the gift is rich and multi-faceted,

And the gift has a direct connection to the journey he's just taken through death and resurrection,

It is his gift of peace.

Peace be with you, he says,

Peace be with you,

Peace be with you.

Let's consider this gift of peace from the risen Lord Jesus today,

that he brings us peace with God,

Peace with each other,

And how he delivers this gift to us even today.

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## **PEACE WITH GOD**

This word peace is a very rich one in the Scriptures,

Behind the Greek word used in the New Testament is the Old Testament Hebrew word Shalom,  
Which many of you would have heard,

It's used right up until today as a greeting in Israel.

It's commonly pointed out that 'shalom' in the Bible is more loaded with significance than perhaps the English word peace gets across.

Peace tends to be for us mainly about there not being war or conflict,

But shalom in the Bible is also about positive blessing, you could say,

It's about wholeness, completeness,

A state of being in which things are in harmony for an individual or a community,

And so it's especially about being in a right relationship to God.

Isaiah famously prophesied about the child who would be born as a future ruler in David's line,

And among the titles given to him was 'Prince of peace' (Isa 9:6).

So as Jesus comes into the world the angels proclaim in his birth,

*'Glory to God in the highest,  
And peace on earth among those he favours'* (Luke 2:14).

But how will he bring this peace?

Well mysteriously the prince of peace brings his peace by himself undergoing suffering and death,

But as he rises from death, triumphing over all those powers which would threaten disorder and harm,

He establishes peace,

And so, in his resurrection he speaks that peace to his disciples,

Now we can well imagine how this would have been a powerful word subjectively for those first disciples to hear,

Disciples who had fled from him,  
Even denied him,

Disciples who are now hiding away behind locked doors in fear,

And even doubting and disbelieving the accounts of his resurrection.

Notice that Jesus speaks his peace just as much to Thomas a week later as he does to the other disciples the first-time round.

So for them we can imagine how powerfully this experience is that the very first word they hear from their Lord after all this is peace.

But it speaks to a much bigger objective reality as well,

That in his death and resurrection,  
For those who trust in Christ and what he's done for them,  
He has brought about a state of affairs where we can have true peace with God.

St Paul puts it this way,  
*'Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'*.  
(Romans 5:1)

Now we do need to acknowledge what's implied in all this.

What's implied is that in our natural state,  
We do not have peace with God.

That left on our own we are something like rebels from God's kingdom in a state of conflict with God.

Just try and think of what it's like when you're in a relationship where you know deep down that things are not at peace between you.

And worse, when you know it's your fault that things are the way they are.

And even worse,  
When you feel at the end of your resources and that there's nothing you can do to bring about the peace you so long for.

That us and God, left on our own.

But the good news of Easter,  
Is that God has taken the initiative,

In Jesus death and resurrection,  
God brings about peace between himself and us,

Those nail marks in his hands and that wound in his side is what it took for him to bring peace.

And Jesus *gives* this gift to his disciples as his 'parting gift' in a sense.

As Jesus had said 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'*. John 14:27

So, the risen Jesus brings us peace with God.

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## **PEACE WITH OTHERS**

But then this peace is like a living, dynamic force,  
There's real spiritual power here,

And the New Testament is very clear that this peace is not only about our relationship to God,  
But also extends to our lives with each other,

The risen Jesus brings peace to our lie together in Christian community as fellow brothers and sisters,  
And encourages us to be peacemakers outside the church too where possible.

Did you notice this theme of community and unity among God's people in our readings today.

Our first reading from Acts spoke of the life of the early Christian Church in Acts,  
Where the common experience of, and testimony to,  
The risen Jesus,  
So radically transformed them that they shared their possessions and lived generously toward each other,  
A new type of community came into being.

In our Psalm we heard these words,  
*'How very good and pleasant it is,  
When brothers and sisters live together in unity'*. Psalm 133:1.

And when Jesus appears after his resurrection just notice how it's almost always to his followers as they are gathered together,

Most obviously in today's reading,

Where the disciples are gathered together on a Sunday,  
They're in church if you like,  
And Jesus comes to them and reveals himself to them.

Thomas isn't there,  
And Jesus doesn't appear to him especially on his own.

But when Thomas returns to the life of the community the next Sunday,  
Then he too encounters the risen Jesus and receives his gift of peace.

There is, if you like,

A horizontal dimension to this gift of peace,  
As well as a vertical one.

In the book of Ephesians St Paul makes this very explicit.

First he says,  
*"[Jesus] himself is our peace, who has made us both one [Jew and Gentile] . . . and reconciled us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.'* Ephesians 2:14

So the picture is that as human beings are reconciled to God,

We are reconciled in one body,

Through one common means,  
In one common community,  
Together,

So that two groups like Jews and Gentiles who ordinarily wouldn't have anything to do with each other,  
Or would in fact be hostile to each other,

And be at peace.

Then later on in the same letter Paul goes on to say,

*'Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'. Ephesians 4:3*

In our text from John this gift of peace is closely connection with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Imagine there's a father with two children, a son and a daughter,  
And there has been a three-way conflict,

Where both the children are in trouble with dad,  
But the brother and sister are also in a conflict with each other.

So dad finds a way to make peace between himself and the children,  
But he doesn't do it individually with each of them,

He does it together,

He gets all three of them to sit down on the couch and talk it all through so that the peace he makes  
with them,  
Becomes a peace they also make with each other.

Notice the connection in our text too between peace and the forgiveness of sins.

I think when we are wronged in the Christian community,

When we do have grievances against each other,

We are meant to think about these situations in connection with the peace God has brought us in  
the resurrection of Christ Jesus,

Jesus died and rose again to bring me peace with God,

Jesus died and rose again to bring this person peace with God,

How can we not now pursue peace with each other?

How can we not hear the call to pursue peace with all people wherever God places us?

Jesus says,

*'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God'* Matthew 5:3.

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**PEACE DELIVERED**

The risen Jesus brings us peace with God,  
He brings us peace with each other,  
And he still brings that peace to us today,  
Especially as we his people gather together in worship.

Have you ever noticed how often the word peace appears in our worship service?

Often after the absolution,  
We hear the very same words spoken to us that we spoken to those disciples we heard about in our text,  
**'Peace be with you'**.

In one of our services we continue in prayer by saying,  
*'In **peace**, let us pray to the Lord...'*

*In the Gloria we sing those words of the angels,  
'Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth **peace**, among those with whom he is pleased'*

At the end of our sermons we often finish with the words:

*'May the **peace** of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus...'*

As we celebrate the Lord's Supper we hold up before you the body and blood of Jesus and we say,  
*'The **peace** of the Lord be with you always'*

As we sing to the Lamb of God we say,  
*'Grant us your **peace**'*

After Holy communion we pray the words of Simeon,  
*'Lord now let your servant depart in **peace**...'*

And the very last word you hear in the service from the pastor is often the word peace,

*'The Lord look upon you with favour,  
And give you **peace**'*

Our worship services are permeated with references to peace,

Why?

Not just because it's a nice sounding word that makes everything feel warm and fuzzy inside.

Not just because the pastor and the congregation are being polite to each other and wishing each other all the best.

No it's far more profound than that.

As Christians gather to hear God's word,  
To pray, to sing,  
To confess and receive God's blessing,

Jesus promises to be in our midst just as he was for those first disciples in our text,  
And to deliver his peace to us today.

Pastor Fraser and I don't speak to you a peace from ourselves,

It's from Jesus,

He is here,  
He is at work,

It's his peace he wants to deliver to you.

I've spoken to more than one person before whose life has been somewhat chaotic,

And who has told me that in that disorder and chaos of their life,

In the presence of God and his people,  
In worship,

has been sometimes the only place,  
They've found peace.

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## **CONCLUSION**

If you go away somewhere and return,  
Maybe you have a favourite gift you always like to give to those you love?

After his journey through death and the grave to resurrection and life.  
The risen Jesus just can't stop giving his gift of peace to those he loves,

It's a peace with God,

It's a peace with each other,

And it's a peace he can give us and work in us even this very day as we gather in worship.

God grant it to us for Jesus' sake, Amen.



