

The Easter Message of the Risen Christ

John 20:19-23

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

*On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “**Peace be with you!**”²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.²¹ Again Jesus said, “**Peace be with you!** As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “**Receive the Holy Spirit.**”²³ If you **forgive** anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”*

Introduction

If Jesus appeared to us again this morning in His resurrection body, what words do you think He would say to us? I believe He would give us the same message that He had given to His disciples 2000 years ago. That’s what you are about to hear from me this morning: the message of the risen Christ to Easter people.

The message was: I give my peace to you. Receive the Holy Spirit. Forgive. Let’s go over them one by one.

Peace be unto you (v. 19, v. 21, v. 26). It was Easter evening. Just a few hours passed since Mary the Magdalene first encountered the risen Christ. The rest of the disciples were hiding. The ten disciples except Thomas were gathered in one place. Grippled with fear of the Jewish authorities, they locked their doors and windows. Then, the risen Christ, out of nowhere, appeared in their midst and said His first greeting: “Shalom.”

I believe the risen Christ would bring the same greetings to us: Peace be unto you. Of course, He is not talking about the world peace that we promote. Rather, He means the peace in our hearts. Notice in today’s text: Jesus said “Shalom” twice, because He meant it and wanted His disciples to have it in their hearts. Isn’t this exactly what we want? The peace that overcomes our fears and anxieties. Now, I mind you Christ is not talking about the peace we have when we are healthy and wealthy and we lose when things fall apart. No, He is talking about the real peace, the peace that transcends all circumstances.

You say, can I really have that peace? *You bet*, Christ says. He promised it: the peace that the world cannot give or take away from us. The peace that only He can give: ²⁷*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid* (John 14:27).

It is the same peace that we experience when we pray—the peace of God that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:6-7). E.g. Hymn “It is well with my soul.” The first stanza reads “*When peace like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul.*” It was written by Horatio Gates Spafford. In 1873, his family was on their way for vacation in Europe. He sent them, his wife and four daughters, ahead aboard the French iron steam ship Ville du Havre. While crossing the Atlantic Ocean, the ship collided with another iron clipper the Loch Earn and sunk. The mother survived, but her four daughters perished. Mr. Spafford took the next boat to meet his wife in Cardiff, Wales, where the survivors had been taken. While sailing past near where his daughters perished, he penned this poem (p. 144, *One Hundred & One famous hymns*, Charles Johnson). It is well with my soul because Christ’s peace attends my way like a river. That peace Christ wants you to have.

Receive the Holy Spirit (v. 22). Christ commands us to receive the Holy Spirit. It’s not an option or suggestion. It’s an imperative. It’s a must. That means, you and I must receive the Spirit of God. Three questions on the Holy Spirit.

Isn’t God or Jesus enough for us? some of us wonder. Why do we need the Holy Spirit? Here’s why. Before He ascended into Heaven, Jesus wanted to prepare His disciples who would be left behind in the world. His desire was not to take them out of the world, but rather send them back into the world. Sending them to the world was like sending the sheep into the lair of wolves. So, Christ says, I will send you with a helper. Not just an ordinary helper, but the divine one. That helper is called the Holy Spirit. This Helper would guide Christians every day on their Heaven-bound journey while they are living in the world as ambassadors of Christ. This Helper is not limited with time or space. He is omnipresent so that God may be with billions of believers all the time. E.g. A farmer’s wife in Korea wondered about the omnipresence of the Spirit among the believers. One moon, yet multiple reflections on rice paddies.

What does He do in us? First and foremost, the Holy Spirit convicts our sins and nudges us to repent our sins. He enables us to believe in the name of Jesus. Without Him, no one can confess that Jesus is their Savior and Lord. If you confess that Jesus is your Savior and Lord with all your heart and mind, you do have the Holy Spirit in you. If you don’t or cannot confess your faith in Jesus, you don’t have the Holy Spirit. E.g. Don’t be deceived by the New Age teaching saying that the small voice in you is the Holy Spirit. The moment when you confess your sins and invite Jesus into your heart, the Holy Spirit enters and stays there.

Next, He is our resident counselor, comforter, and teacher. He guides us with the truth. He reminds us of Jesus’ teaching. He helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us with wordless groans when we don’t know what we ought to pray for (Romans 8:26).

Receive the Holy Spirit.

Forgive (v. 23): Consider this: out of so many things Jesus could have said to the disciples on that very first Easter evening, why this one: forgive? Because, our salvation and eternal life depend on it. Without forgiveness, believed and practiced by us, we won't be in Heaven. That's how simple and significant forgiveness is.

To His disciples, Christ has given the awesome authority and power to practice: to forgive/retain others' sins. Do we practice such authority and power on a regular basis? Not really. Seldom have we the Protestants practiced this privilege in the name of Christ. The only case I know is the Catholic priests who remit the sins of the people who come to the confession. We too must use the authority of forgiving someone's sins.

Now, some of you might have noticed the second part of v. 23, "if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." I am sure many of us have one or two individuals in our lives whom we haven't forgiven yet (or unwilling to forgive)--because they trespassed against us big time. E.g. Once I heard a believer saying, "I would **never ever** forgive so and so."

Perhaps you would never forgive the sins of your enemies because you think they don't deserve your forgiveness. Think again. What makes you think that you deserve absolute and unlimited God's grace and forgiveness, yet you refuse to reciprocate the same grace for your fellow humans? Here's the spiritual truth. Even though none of us deserves God's unconditional love and grace, God still forgives us. Why forgive others? Because we receive it from God first. The same God expects and commands us to do the same for our fellow humans. He loves to see us be like Him: show mercy and forgive each other. Furthermore, from a practical point of view, ask yourself: is it really good for my well-being to keep their sins un-forgiven forever? The answer is "No," because it is eternally bad for the both parties; you and them if you haven't. Here's why: because, if you don't forgive them, your own sins remain un-forgiven forever along with theirs. By God. Do you understand it now?

I must remind you of Jesus' own words: Unless you forgive their sins from your heart, your Father in heaven will not forgive your sins, either (Matthew 18:35). If their sins are not forgiven by you, then neither will be yours by God.

Here's another reminder. Remember the Lord's Prayer where we say "Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"? It is conditional. Unless you forgive them, your sins will remain un-forgiven.

Recap: Christ wants you to have His peace. But, without the Holy Spirit, and without forgiving others, you won't have peace. The risen Christ says to the Easter people: Shalom to you. Receive the Holy Spirit and forgive. Let's pray.