



Easter 2 2019 11 am

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus' first words to his disciples when he meets with them on the evening of Easter Day are: "Peace be with you!"

Simple words followed up with a simple action: Jesus shows them his hands and his side.

Jesus' greeting echoes his earlier assurances, given in the same Upper Room, where he had shared his Last Supper with his disciples, that his parting gift to his disciples is Peace - although it may not be peace as the world understands it.

By showing them his wounded hands and his pierced side, Jesus reveals to his friends (most of whom had, of course, deserted him) that this Peace, his Peace, comes at the most enormous price; that this Peace, his peace, comes through the nails and the spear of crucifixion; the crown of thorns and the humiliation of summary trial and desertion – even betrayal – by those to whom he now offers his peace.

At the Last Supper, Jesus had urged his disciples not to let their hearts be troubled. But, of course, their hearts were troubled, very troubled. They had just heard him say that he was about to be betrayed, and worse still, that the betrayal would be by one of them.

And if that was not enough, Jesus followed up the news of his betrayal by telling his disciples that he was about to leave them, and that though they would abandon him, he will not leave them.

Jesus reassures them that he leaves them with ‘a gift’: the ‘gift’ of his ‘peace’, ‘peace’ but not *as the world gives it nor understands it*.

Those of you who have travelled in the Arabic- or Hebrew-speaking world will know that ‘peace’ is used both as a greeting and as a farewell: “Shalom,” “Salaam” ‘peace be with you’.

In one word, a good desire is expressed, that ‘peace’ – ‘wellbeing’, prosperity’, ‘good intention’ – be with the person who is greeted or from whom leave is taken. A bit like our “Goodbye” – ‘God be with you’. It’s a desire, a good desire, but it’s only a desire.

But Jesus talks not about a ‘desire’, but about a ‘gift’: “peace I give you; *my own peace* I leave with you.”

The “peace which the world gives” is dependent upon outward circumstances, circumstances beyond the giver’s or the receiver’s control. It was thus in Jesus day, and it is, of course, the same today.

If we read in our newspapers or in our newsfeeds that there is a call for peace in Jerusalem, or Colombo or Syria or Yemen, we know that what is being asked for is a peace heavily dependent on external circumstance – peace based on a brokered curfew, promised dialogue, or by some degree of an international intervention or meditation – an engineered ‘peace’, a ‘peace’ marked by an ‘absence’ of something (bombing or sniper fire protest) rather than by anything else.

This somewhat negative understanding of what makes for peace, was very much the understanding of the prevailing Greek culture of Jesus’ own day. Peace as the absence of war or strife.

In his play *Murder in the Cathedral*, T S Eliot wrote about this kind of ‘constructed peace’: a ‘manufactured peace’, a ‘peace’ engineered though taking things away, “peace as we think of it: the kingdom of England at peace with its neighbours, the barons at peace with the King, the householder counting over his peaceful gains, the swept hearth”.ⁱ

But for the Jews, Peace was not about the absence of something, it was about the real, tangible presence of God with his people.

And that is what Jesus promises his disciples; so that even if the surrounding atmosphere is one of hatred and rejection, of betrayal and suspicion – with every prospect of death – the disciples might know *his* peace within themselves and within their fellowship.

Jesus’ gift of ‘peace’ is the gift of nothing less than himself: his betrayed, tied, humiliated, crucified and resurrected self.

This great and generous gift, promised to his disciples in the Upper Room at the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday, is now offered again to his disciples in the Upper Room on the first Easter evening, and again a week later when Thomas comes out of hiding and joins the disciples and it is offered now to us!

Our task, our duty, our joy, as Christians – as Jesus’ disciples – is to learn both to accept his gracious gift of his peace and to offer his gift to others.

Like the disciples gathered in Jerusalem, we must be both the *receivers* of his gift; the *receivers* of his ‘peace’, which the writer to the Ephesians tells us ‘breaks down all that divides . . . which abolishes the law with its commandments and ordinances and which reconciles all things to God in one body through the cross’ and *givers* of this peace.ⁱⁱ

The ‘peace’ that leads from death to Life, from falsehood to Truth, from despair to Hope, from fear to Trust, from hate to Love, from war to Peace, as the International Peace Prayer puts it.ⁱⁱⁱ

So may we, this Eastertide, like the frightened disciples be both receivers of Christ's gift of peace, and may that peace so fill our hearts that we might share it, not only with those who stand alongside us on a Sunday but with our families, our neighbours, our communities, those with whom we work and those with whom we take our leisure, our world, our universe – and all for Christ's sake.

Amen.

ⁱ Thomas Becket's sermon on Christmas morning of 1170, *Murder in the Cathedral*, Robert Bolt, 196x, cf., *Murder in the Cathedral*, T S Elliott, 1935

ⁱⁱ q.v. Ephesians 2.15

ⁱⁱⁱ Lead me from death to life,
from falsehood to truth;
lead me from despair to hope,
from fear to trust;
lead me from hate to love,
from war to peace.
Let peace fill our heart,
our world, our universe.