

Sermon for Easter 2, Year C

Text: John 20:19-31

‘The risen Jesus brings peace’

The sermon for today has been sourced from the LCA website for lay reading purposes.

Summary: In our Gospel reading today, we hear Jesus use the phrase “peace be with you” three times, but in different contexts. First, to the disciples' fear, bringing joy; second, to Thomas' doubt, inspiring faith; and third, to all believers as they are sent into the world to share this peace through forgiveness.

Through His wounds, His presence, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus not only offers peace but equips His followers to carry that peace into a broken world.

Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus, open our ears to hear Your Word, open our eyes to see your peace in action and open our hearts to accept the peace that you alone can give. **Amen**

Today you're going to hear me mention the word peace quite a lot. And I thought it was timely to start with a quote from the late Pope Francis that he shared on World Peace Day just a few months ago.

Pope Francis said “may we seek the true peace that is granted by God to hearts disarmed: hearts not set on calculating what is mine and what is yours; hearts that turn selfishness into readiness to reach out to others; hearts that see themselves as indebted to God and thus prepared to forgive the debts that oppress others; hearts that replace anxiety about the future with the hope that every individual can be a resource for the building of a better world.”¹

¹ <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/20241208-messaggio-58giornatamondiale-pace2025.html>

Peace is one of our deepest longings. We long for peace in our world, in our families, in our heart and conscience.

In today's reading we hear Jesus say three times the words "peace be with you". This is his post-resurrection greeting. Words which not only **wish** peace *for* us but **give** peace *to* us.

So, this morning, I want to look at the three times Jesus speaks this greeting of peace in this story, because they're all into a slightly different context for a different purpose. First, he speaks peace to our fears, to bring joy. Second how he speaks peace to our doubts and unbelief, to bring faith and confession of faith. Third he speaks peace as he sends us out into the world, to spread his peace through the forgiveness of sins.

So first, Jesus speaks peace to our **fear**.

In what sort of emotional state do we find the disciples immediately after the resurrection of Jesus? Behind locked doors, paralysed by **fear**.

And into this fear, Jesus comes and says, '*Peace be with you*'.

Now notice two things here: first that Jesus does not wait for them to come and find him, he comes looking for them. And in his post-resurrection glorified body, not even locked doors can keep him out.

And second, when he comes, it's not a word of rebuke for deserting him in his time of need, not a word of condemnation for timidly hiding away in fear, but a word of *peace*.

In the midst of being paralysed by fear, Jesus' peace comes as an unexpected gift.

Then strangely, he points immediately to his wounds, his hands and side. Now why all this emphasis on the wounds of Jesus in this story?

In the first place this is proof of who he is, but there's more going on here. As Jesus points them to his now glorified wounds, it's as if he is saying:

'Here is the **reason** I can speak peace to you'.

At his birth the angels sang of the coming of peace on earth. Before he died, Jesus said,

'Peace I leave you, My peace I give you, I do not give to you as the world gives, Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid'

Now the climatic event which establishes this peace one and for all has happened (we lived through it last week) – his death and resurrection. Jesus is saying this is what ultimately brought peace.

And so, the disciples' fear gives way to rejoicing.

St Paul put it this way:

'But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he is our peace...He has made peace, reconciling us to God through the cross...

Have you ever noticed how this greeting of peace echoes through our own worship services, through our liturgy?

After the absolution, 'peace be with you'.

After the sermon, 'the peace of God guard your hearts..'

Before Communion, 'peace be with you'.

As we close, 'The Lord give you peace'.

This is no accident of course. Because just as on that first Easter Sunday when the disciples were gathered, Jesus came and stood among them and spoke peace, so here Sunday by Sunday as we are gathered, Jesus our risen Lord, comes and stands among us to speak his peace, especially his peace to our fear.

Because it's not as if the disciples never feared again after this. On the following Sunday when they're together again, the doors are still locked.

There is an ongoing temptation for the disciples to be overcome by fear, and so a continual need for them to be gathered together to receive peace from the risen Jesus.

So, he first speaks peace to our fear.

Second, we see how Jesus speaks his peace to our **doubts** and **unbelief**.

Fear is the big problem for the 11 disciples. Doubt and unbelief are the problem, especially for Thomas.

For some reason, Thomas wasn't there that first Sunday evening. And when the other disciples shared with him their eye-witness testimony, he just couldn't believe it. Hence the nickname he's been given ever since, 'Doubting Thomas'.

But we should be careful not to be too hard on our friend Thomas here. Because for one, he loved Jesus and he'd just had his heart broken by seeing him crucified, and so this surely seemed too good to be true. No-one wants to get their hopes up again when they've been so dashed.

But also notice again how Jesus comes to him in his unbelief. Once again, Jesus does not come the following week and give Thomas a good telling off for his lack of faith or his not being with the other disciples. Instead, he comes to Thomas in his doubts, in his unbelief, and he again says:

'Peace be with you.'

And he even accommodates himself to Thomas' request to see the wounds.

We all struggle with doubts, we all know people in the Christian community who find it hard to believe in certain aspects of the Christian faith.

Perhaps these people are close to you, in your own family. Perhaps some of us are here today who struggle with faith.

This story shows us that Jesus does not write people off who are in this sort of situation. In your doubts and unbelief, Jesus' wounds are for you too. His death and resurrection are for your peace too.

He wants to meet people in their doubts, **but** he doesn't want to leave them there. This story doesn't make a *virtue* of scepticism. Jesus doesn't say to Thomas,

'Hey no worries, life's a journey and whether you really believe in me or not it's not a big deal. It's all good. Faith or no faith, it's all the same at the end of day'.

No, Jesus meets Thomas in his doubt, but then he looks at him right between the eyes and says, '*Do not be unbelieving, but believe*'.

This story shows how Jesus brings the doubting Thomas to make the strongest confession of faith in the whole Bible of who Jesus is:

'My Lord and my God!'

Don't give up on your unbelieving family and friends. A part of the work of the risen Lord Jesus is to **restore** faith. And sometimes the strongest confession of faith comes from those who have been through the most vigorous doubts.

So, Jesus speaks peace to our fears. He speaks peace to our doubts and unbelief.

Then finally for today we look at the third time he says, 'Peace be with you', which is to **send us out** to the world.

"Jesus said again, 'Peace be with you'. As the Father has sent me, so I send you'."

This greeting of peace is especially connected with the disciples' commissioning for a task, with their being sent out to the world to continue the work of the Father and the Son.

This is an important part of Jesus greeting of peace, that the peace he bestows on them is not only for themselves. Remember Jesus had said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers'.

Jesus brings his peace to us not only for ourselves, but so that we can take that peace to the world.

The custom of the sharing of the peace in worship gives a good illustration of this. We receive peace from God, then that peace is to have a ripple effect.

We strive to live at peace with each other in the Christian community. We are sent out into the world as people of peace.

Now there are two questions then which could arise;

How can we possibly do this as the weak, fearful, doubting human beings that we are?

And even if we could do it, what does it actually look like? What is the content of this mission of peace?

Jesus addresses both of these issues in his next words: he breathes on them and says,

'Receive the Holy Spirit...'

There is the power to actually carry out God's mission in the world which we could never do on our own.

The mission of peace the Church has in the world is all about forgiveness. That is striking.

Because everyone wants peace. But how do we look for it?

In the world we look at politics and diplomacy, which of course have their place, and are very important.

In families or relationships, we try and learn how to communicate better and manage schedules and so on, which is important and has its place.

In our own hearts and conscience, we try to change our negative thought patterns and keep a check on our emotional responses, which can be very helpful and has its place.

But the Word of God teaches us that beneath all of it the driving force of peace, is forgiveness of sins.

The forgiveness accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus for all people, the forgiveness delivered in his church. Jesus brings us his peace, but this is a gift simply too good to be kept behind locked doors, so he sends us out to the world with his peace.

In your **fears** and **anxieties**,

Our Lord Jesus Christ says:

‘Peace be with you.’

Rejoice because he is risen and stands among us.

In your **doubts** and **unbelief**,

Our Lord Jesus Christ says:

‘Peace be with you.’

Stop being unbelieving, but believe, and confess, as Thomas did,

‘My Lord and my God’.

And **as we are sent** into the world,

Our Lord Jesus Christ says:

‘Peace be with you.’

Let us share with others the good news of forgiveness and peace in Christ Jesus. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.