

Declaration

“The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17)

Hymn: by G Gilkeson, C Llewellyn – Rend Collective

1. In my wrestling and in my doubts, in my failures You won't walk out
Your great love will lead me through
You are the peace in my troubled sea, oh! You are the peace in my troubled sea
My Lighthouse, my Lighthouse, shining in the darkness, I will follow You, oh!
My Lighthouse, my Lighthouse, I will trust the promise, You will carry me safe to shore,
Safe to shore (x3)
2. In the silence, You won't let go. In the questions, Your truth will hold
Your great love will lead me through
You are the peace in my troubled sea, oh, You are the peace in my troubled sea ...
3. I won't fear what tomorrow brings, with each morning I'll rise and sing
My God's love will lead me through
You are the peace in my troubled sea, oh, You are the peace in my troubled sea ...
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Prayer

Dear Father,

You are a God of peace. Your presence is peace. Your Word brings peace. Thank you that in my wrestling and in my doubts your great love will lead me through.

Gracious Father, you have walked with me in faithfulness to your great Covenant of Peace. How great is your love. Accept my deep gratitude for that love that covers a multitude of sins.

May this time of fellowship be a hallowed hour, in Jesus' Name, Amen

Scripture Reading

- John 20:19-23

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

Message: “Peace Be With You”

What an extraordinary time it was. It was now the evening of Resurrection Sunday, around 6:00pm, and a group of men and women were all together in a house in Jerusalem, probably the second floor guest room of Acts 2:1, and the same room as the Last Supper.

We are told that “the Eleven and those with them” (Lk 24:33), including several women (Lk 24:10) were present. The women would have included Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna, Salome “and others with them” (Lk 24:10) who had visited the tomb that morning only to find the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. “He is not here. He is risen” they were told. So they returned to the house and told the disciples who did not believe them because “their words seemed to them like nonsense”.

No doubt Mary the mother of Jesus was also present. Were the words of Simeon some 33 years earlier repeating themselves over and over again – “a sword will pierce your own soul”? Ah Simeon, you don’t know how right you were.

It were these six women at least who were present with the others on that Sunday evening in the house in Jerusalem. All had faithfully served the Lord during his ministry. All were affected in different ways by Jesus’ life and ministry. All were witnesses to the horrifying events of the last few days. Everybody present heard their testimony.

“And others with them” would have included two disciples, one called Cleopas, who on that same day had walked to Emmaus, not far from Jerusalem. They had met a stranger whom they eventually recognized as Jesus (we are told that “Jesus appeared in a different form” (Mk 16:12)), and immediately returned to the house in Jerusalem.

Peter and John had also checked out the tomb, only to find it empty. Mary Magdalene went with them, but couldn’t keep up. By the time she got there, Peter and John had already been and gone. Then she experienced that beautiful and personal encounter with the Lord. Later that day Peter also had a personal encounter with Jesus.

All these things happened on that first day of the week. And now all the players were present in the one location.

But even before this day, according to the two from Emmaus, everybody in Jerusalem was already talking about the recent events. Now add the events of today!

Can you imagine the buzz of conversation in the room? So much to talk about.

There’s the last supper, the words that Jesus spoke, especially to love one another, the Garden of Gethsemane, the betrayal and Judas’s gory suicide, those miserable high priests, Annanias and Caiaphas, the crowds – remember what the crowds were saying just a week earlier! Peter’s denial and shame, the cold, the other priests, the blatant hypocrisy, the fake trial, the yelling, the insurrectionist Barabas being released, there’s Pilate and the hand washing, the astonishing walk to Golgotha, and Simon from Cyrene, more crowds, the crucifixions, the screams, but the contrasting quiet composure of Jesus, the emotions, the soldiers divvying up Jesus’ clothes, the crucified thieves either side, the words from the cross, his death, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, the tomb and burial of Jesus, the fear, and more. Oh, and the fig tree!

“Peace Be With You”

And now, by the evening of this first day of the week there’s more! There’s an empty tomb, and angels, Jesus apparently walking to Emmaus, but “in a different form” then disappearing, the testimony of the women, and did Peter really meet with Jesus? On and on. Layer upon layer of wonder and excitement and mystery and astonishment. Noise.

Perhaps in stark contrast, was Mary the mother of Jesus, seated somewhere by herself, silently “pondering all these things in her heart” as she has been doing for the last 33 years. As the footy commentators are prone to say during a grand final, the atmosphere in that room was electric.

So this is the scene into which the main player now appears. No drama. No clap of thunder. No bright lights. No suspense music. We are told simply that “Jesus stood among them”.

Everything changes. The conversations die down. Noise and excitement turns to pin-drop, awe-struck silence. Jesus indicates he is about to speak. What’s he going to say? We’ve betrayed him. We’ve denied him. We’ve run away from him. He’s just experienced a mock trial. A murderer and insurrectionist was preferred over him. The religious leaders demonstrated hypocritical, self-serving arrogance of the highest order. The Roman governor washed his hands of the whole thing. He was mocked, scourged and crucified by the Romans. Even the priests had mocked him. Even God had forsaken him!

What’s he going to say? What would you say? What did he say? “Peace be with you”.

Then wait a few seconds for that to sink in. Still there is silence. Then he shows them his hands and side. Then pandemonium. The writer of the gospel simply says “[they] were overjoyed”. Even Steven Spielberg would have trouble replicating the emotion of this moment. If the public could see what was happening, would they not say what they said 40 days later: “They have had too much wine” (Acts 2:13). Tears and laughter and astonishment and hugs and joy.

Then things quieten down again. Jesus has more to say. Perhaps this time he will remind everybody of what he has gone through: the suffering, the disappointment, the injustice.

But no. “Peace be with you” he says.

He then follows this up with a commission, a gift, and transfer of authority.

1. The commission to be sent by Jesus as Jesus himself had been sent by the Father;
2. The gift of the Holy Spirit;
3. The authority to forgive, or indeed and surprisingly, to not forgive.

What a day it was, this resurrection Sunday; this first day of the week. There has never been a day like it, neither before nor since. Is it any wonder the church wants to continue celebrating that day?

Dear Christian, what is the context of your life? Is there drama, misunderstanding, regrets, hopes not realized, fears and anxieties, the noise and hurly burly of life, the cost of living, climate concerns and the lack of rain, energy costs and energy supply, floods, droughts, money concerns, church and home property maintenance, relationships, health, this afternoon, tomorrow and the day after, you name it ...

“Peace Be With You”

Jesus would stand in the midst of all that, in the midst of the circumstances of life, your life, and what would he say? You know what he would say: “Peace be with you”. Would you dare say to Jesus: “Oh, but you don’t understand”? Would anyone dare say: “All very well for you in heaven saying ‘Peace be with you’. What would you know?” Would anyone dare say that? I don’t think so.

Oh he might incidentally remind us of his own suffering by figuratively showing his hands and his side. But this display of hands and side, why do that? It’s certainly not primarily to bring attention to his suffering. No way! Instead it’s to demonstrate that this Jesus was killed but it is the same Jesus who today is alive and stands among his people. Maybe he said it then, we’re not told, but he certainly did say it later, and would say it today: “I died, and behold I am alive for evermore” (Rev 1:18).

If this Jesus was to stand with you today, what would he say? He would say again: “Peace be with you”. This is the nature of the Living God, a God of peace, despised by many, but worshipped and loved by many. Yes, “in the world you will have trouble”, he said, “but I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace” (Jn 16:33). Dear Christian, let Jesus stand in your midst, both collectively as the church and individually, and hear him speak peace. Let Jesus travel with you wherever you are, whatever your circumstance, and be for you *the* source of peace, eternal peace, good quality peace.

“Peace be with you”. Amen.

Hymn: by H Spafford and P Bliss

1. 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 is well (it is well) with my soul (with my soul)! It is well, it is well with my soul!
2. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, Let this blessed assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate, and has shed His own blood for my soul...
3. My sin – oh, the bliss of this glorious thought – my sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to His cross and I bear it no more! Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! ...
4. And, Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll,
The trumpet shall sound, and the Lord shall descend! Even so – it is well with my soul! ...

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Benediction

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

This service was prepared by Warren Mack for HopeNet SA