

**Sunday 7 April 2024**  
**The Second Sunday of Easter**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**NT: Acts 4:32-25**

**NT: I John 1:1-2:2**

**Gp: John 20:19-end**

Alleluia 'Christ is Risen' 'He is risen indeed!'

For a couple of minutes, I want you to relax, close your eyes and I want you to imagine a scene of peace – close your eyes and imagine it – describe it to yourself as fully as you can – enter into it deeply enough to feel its glow.

Some may have pictured yourselves dozing in the warm sunshine whilst in your garden listening to the birds, some may have seen themselves in a peaceful landscape empty of people. Some may have seen a field full of grain gently waving in a breeze, or a scene where you are lying on an empty beach listening to the waves gently lapping onto the beach, or what about sitting and resting beside a stream in the woods with the water making music as it runs over and around the stones as it flows on its way.

Whatever the picture you have made and entered into, the chances are it was not like the kind of scene we find in our gospel text this morning. The text speaks of locked doors, secret meetings by night and of fear. None of these things makes a person normally think about peace.

It seems clear however that the reading from John wants us to see the two visits of Jesus to his disciples in the upper room as occasions of peace. And perhaps they can speak to us about some dimensions of peace that we do not normally think of – perhaps they can speak to us of peace during turmoil – of peace in the midst of fear – of peace in the midst of doubt. No doubt things like we are currently finding ourselves in.

There is a story of how a woman once went to a church service where the entire congregation was told, "If you don't have a smile on your face, you've got the wrong religion and shouldn't be here. Christianity is a religion of joy."

She fled that service in tears because she did not feel at that time like she could smile. She was having difficulties and was looking for comfort. Instead, she was being told that she was not good enough for God because she was not smiling.

God never asks us to fake our experience. Our risen Lord never waits until we are already happy in order to come to us, and he never wears a fixed-on smile.

Think of this for a moment, Jesus could have miraculously destroyed his wounds after he was raised from the tomb, but he chose not to. He bore the marks of his wounds into the presence of his disciples. In the same way Jesus does not ask us to banish our wounds when we come into his presence – not even at Easter when we are supposed to be full of joy.

The risen Jesus came to his disciples in the midst of their turmoil and fear. He came in the midst of their doubt and their sense of having failed both him and their selves and said to them: “Peace be with you.”

And when he said this, he showed them his wounds – the holes in his hands and in his side – almost as if to say: See these wounds? Feel them and know that it is all right to hurt. Pain comes to us all – I was hurt as all people are hurt – but that pain and that hurt no longer has dominion over me. I live as I said I would. I told you that I would suffer and that you, if you followed me, would also suffer. But I told you too that after passing through various trials and tests – that pain and even death itself would lose its power – its power over me and its power over those who believe in me.

The three times that Jesus offers his peace to his disciples in today’s reading – it is done in close connection with the wounds of crucifixion. The enemies of peace had already done their worst to him. They had made cowards and liars of his followers and had mocked his own words and actions. They had humiliated him in the city streets. They had violated his flesh and robbed him of his life. But their hostilities against him as we know had failed. On the evening of the first day of the week he came to his disciples and showed them that he lived despite the worst that could happen.

The peace that Jesus offers can be described as the confidence his followers are able to take from his resurrected appearance. His return on that first day of the week signalled the fact that his life and promises will endure. His “peace be with you” was more than a greeting to be followed by another goodbye. It was the declaration of a persistent fact. Because Jesus lives, nothing can separate his followers from him and from life in him.

The disciples realised this fact and in realising it received the peace that Jesus offered – the peace that only Jesus could offer – for without him they would have been left to continue alone in the darkness and fear in their locked rooms and secret meetings.

The confidence that the disciples received when Jesus came and said to them “peace be with you” is demonstrated in the response of the disciples to his appearance. Peace showed itself in their rejoicing – and also in Thomas’ confession of faith – “My Lord, and my God.”

And peace showed itself, confidence showed itself, inner security showed itself, later when the disciples left that room and went into the world to proclaim the love and forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ – the risen Lord.

But, notice that none of the external circumstances of the disciples changed when they received and accepted the peace that Christ offered them.

They believed in him, they had confidence in him, they knew that nothing could separate them from God's love after he appeared to them, but they still had to face the same situation they faced before he broke into the room they had locked because of their fear. They still had to face the authorities who wanted to see an end to the followers of Jesus. They still had to risk going out on the streets, they still had to deal with the crowds who had mocked and crucified Jesus. They still had to face trials and tribulations, just as we do.

Peace be with you are the words of Jesus to us. Peace be with you and blessed are you when you have not seen, as the disciples saw, and yet have come to believe.

Blessed are you, not because life will be plain sailing for you. Blessed are you, not because you will always want to smile and will never have to suffer. But blessed are you because you have linked yourself to a power greater than your own; to a power that wants to sustain you and will sustain you, to the power that raised Jesus from the dead. To the power that will bring you to the inheritance that Jesus has won for us, that inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, who are being protected by the power of God through faith.

The risen Jesus comes to us this day and every day. We are even more blessed than the disciples because we haven't seen him face to face, yet we believe. Jesus comes to us bringing peace and to mould us into a united, loving community, his body, where people are equal. He comes to surprise us, to disturb us, to make us think again, to do a double-take. Jesus comes to breathe new life into places where our lives have become stale or predictable. To challenge us to think outside the box and to remind us that nothing is set in stone. Be challenged, be transformed by the risen Jesus and go out from here to dare to change the world.

Finally, I wish to leave you with these words of Jesus. They are the words Jesus spoke to his disciples just before he went out to the Garden of Gethsemane and onward from there to his cross and his death.

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. Believe in God, believe also in me.

'Christ is Risen' 'He is risen indeed!'

**Mthr Jennifer Brady**