

The Lord sends John 20:19-23

How would you define **peace**?

For some of us peace is all about **finding some quiet in a storm of noise**. Maybe there have been occasions in the last 12 months when the intensity of the volume has all been too much and you've found yourself yelling, "Can I have some peace?"

For others peace is about **a lack of conflict**. Sometimes the conflict might be on a national scale. Like the presence of war in a country. The people long for peace. But sometimes the conflict is much closer to home. It might be fighting brothers or sisters. Or that family feud that continues to spark and explode. And in the middle of it all we long for peace. The **absence** of conflict and the **presence** of good healthy relationships.

This morning I want to talk about **peace**.

You may have noticed that in this very short section of John's Gospel **peace is mentioned twice**. There are only five verses but on two occasions we get the same phrase. Jesus says to his disciples, "Peace be with you."

This is a Bible way of telling us what is important.

It's a bit like us putting something in bold or using a highlighter on a page. It reveals the big idea that we are supposed to notice.

There are **two things** about peace that I want to show us.

- The people of God must savour peace (Vs 19-20)
- The people of God must speak about peace (Vs 21-23)

First, the people of God must savour peace (Vs 19-20)

Look at verse 19. **Read verses 19 and 20**.

This is a fascinating scene.

We've got the disciples of Jesus on the day of his resurrection and what are they doing? They're not out on the streets, full of faith and courage, confidently proclaiming that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

No, they are locked up, frightened out of their wits and snuggled together because their whole world has collapsed.

Don't you love the honesty of the Bible? It's not exactly an impressive role model of courage and passion for future generations. But it's what they did. So it gets recorded in God's book for the world to see.

What happens next is amazing. The risen Jesus comes to them and brings them overwhelming joy.

It strikes me that **Jesus didn't wait for his disciples to stir up their faith**. He didn't stand at a distance until his followers reached a certain faith level and then respond with a visit. **No, he came to them in their fear in order to give them faith**. Isn't this a wonderful picture of grace?

It's so easily for us to forget how Jesus operates. We fall back so quickly into a pattern that thinks that God responds to our performance and achievements. That somehow we need to improve our situation, fix the problem, get our life together – and then God will be interested. Not at all! Jesus is a God of grace and he comes to us in the mess to help and to heal.

The other thing that strikes me is that **Jesus arrives in the room through locked doors.**

I find it easy to walk through open doors. And I can just about manage to go through doors that are closed but are unlocked. But I'm not able to arrive in spaces that require access through locked doors that I don't have the key for. **What about you?**

Walking into locked rooms doesn't seem to be a problem for the risen Jesus. It's completely mind-blowing! Please don't misunderstand who Jesus is. He isn't a disembodied ghost who can easily pass through solid structures. No, he has been physically raised from the dead and enjoys resurrection life. But his new body has some fun properties like the ability to enter through locked doors.

As **a passing application of this truth**, let me quote something I found helpful from an American pastor called John Piper. He says, "Jesus can go where no one else can go. He can go where no counselor can go. He can go where no doctor can go. He can go where no lover can go. He can reach you, and reach into you, anywhere and any time. There is no place where you are, and no depths of personhood that you are which Jesus can't penetrate." Isn't this wonderful to know? Jesus often uses the help of a counsellor or doctor or whatever. But whether he does or doesn't, he has an ability to help in ways deemed impossible by others!

Let's go back to this resurrection appearances of Jesus. Let's think about what he said when he arrives in the room.

Four simple words. **End of verse 19.** Peace be with you.

Many of us will know how to say hello in different languages.

In **English** we could say, hello or hi or hey.

In **French**, we could say bonjour or salut.

In **Hindi** we would say namaste.

In **Scottish** you could say, "Hey wee man, how you doing?"

In the language that Jesus spoke, which is **Hebrew**, you would greet people by saying **shalom**. Which means, "Peace be with you."

The **critical question** when we read in John chapter 20 that Jesus says shalom to his disciples is, what does he mean?

Is he merely saying, hello, hi, nice to see you, it's good to be back? That is, is he simply using a typical Hebrew greeting or is he saying something more profound?

The truth is that **he is saying something very deep and very wonderful about what he has just achieved by dying on the cross.**

Here's what he said to his disciples back in **John 14:27**, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."

He says this as he heads to the cross. The Prince of Peace has come into the world in order to secure peace between God and his enemies. We are his enemies, sinful rebels who have committed cosmic treason against the true sovereign of the universe. But consumed with love Jesus purposefully heads to the cross to take the punishment that will secure peace for all who trust in him. He dies the death we deserve. He suffers the judgement in our place. All so that we can enjoy peace.

And now what happens after the resurrection? Jesus appears to his disciples and says, "Peace be with you."

That is, my mission has been accomplished. I've done it. My death has worked. The price has been paid. As a result, peace is now available. You can be reconciled to God with no fear of ever having to endure his wrath. Wow! What a day. Happy days!

This explanation makes sense of what Jesus does in verse 20. Listen to what we're told. **Read verse 20.**

Why does Jesus show them his hands and his sides? **For two reasons.**

- To reassure them that he is the Jesus they know and love. He still bears the scars of the cross. What a thought that the perfect body of Jesus is not ashamed of the cross. It is not a badge of shame, it is a badge of glory.
- He also does this to make the link between peace and the cross. In **verse 19** Jesus says peace is available. And then in **verse 20** he explains why this is possible. Because of his death on the cross. There is no reconciliation without the release of blood. There is no peace without propitiation.

Did you spot the emotional response of the disciples to this news? **Verse 20.** The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Many of us have been overjoyed recently as we have been able to see people we haven't seen for months.

The disciples are overjoyed when they see Jesus. Why? It's only been a few days. They now see again the crucified and risen Jesus, the one who has promised forgiveness for all their sins and who has delivered on all that he said. They see this one! And they are filled with joy.

Joy is found as we savour the peace won by Jesus on the cross.

Savour is a deliberate word choice. It implies a slow spiritual chewing of wonderful truth.

I love watching the film version of Roald Dahl's The Fantastic Mr Fox. I love watching how he eats. In one scene he is at the table reading his newspaper, ready to eat. You're expecting a civilised fox to munch his way slowly through his breakfast. But he doesn't. He's an animal so he scoffs it down very quickly.

We are not to be like him with the peace of God. We are to **savour** the news. We are to sing about the cross. Pray about the cross. Read about the cross. Talk about the cross. Preach about the cross.

The death of Jesus is to remain central to our faith.

When it is, the Lord will bring us great joy!

Second, the people of God must speak about peace (Vs 21-23)

The order is vital. Before we speak we must savour. But we mustn't end with savouring.

The news of the cross is not just for us. It is for the world.

This is what Jesus spells out in verses 21 to 23.

Listen to verse 21. **Read verses 21 to 23.**

Notice the emphasis of this section. Jesus is sending his people.

He is sending them out into the world with the message of forgiveness and peace.

How are we to make sense of this power of forgiveness? Who are we to declare that someone is forgiven or not?

This is what **the message of the gospel** allows us to do.

We speak about Jesus and explain that salvation is found by putting our faith in Jesus. If someone has then we know they are forgiven. We can declare forgiveness. If they haven't, then they are not at peace with God.

What is my purpose? What is your purpose? Your ultimate purpose as a Christian is to be sent out into the world by Jesus to bring the message of peace.

You may do this as a bin man or a teacher or as a home school mum or as a nurse or a doctor or as a carer or cleaner or someone trying to find a job or as a retired citizen collecting your pension or as a child at school or whatever...it doesn't matter. Jesus says to all his followers, young and old, I am sending you into the world to speak about the peace I have won on the cross.

Did you notice that he is sending us into the world in the same way that the Father sent him into the world?

This means there are certain aspects of the mission of Jesus that become the model for how we are to do it.

Let me highlight one that is very relevant for us.

Jesus is sacrificial from the beginning to the end.

His mission was costly and risky and not the way to achieve comfort and safety for all harm. In order to do his mission, he had to give up his own desires and put the needs of others before his own.

Here is the **challenge**. Jesus says to us, in the same way that the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.

This means that if our mission for Jesus is to be successful then we need to embrace his sacrificial attitude for the salvation of others.

This is tough! I don't know about you but I feel that so often I am hard wired to do the opposite.

I flee from the needs of others and prioritise my own comfort and security. I find myself constantly making decisions that maximise my ease and minimise my discomfort.

But then I look at the way to the cross and the bloody cross itself and see how my Saviour won my salvation. And I hear his gentle voice say, "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you."

Here's the question. **How can we do it?** How can we possibly follow the model of Jesus? Look at what Jesus says in verse 22. **Read verse 22.**

In the **middle** of this section is the answer that we need to hear. The one who sends us is the one who equips us.

Jesus doesn't send us to do the impossible. No, he sends us with the Holy Spirit living within us.

One of the main jobs of the Holy Spirit is to **powerfully kill our selfishness** and **make us more sacrificial** for the sake of others.

I'm sure there is a deliberate connection we are supposed to make between this section and the book of Genesis.

Genesis 2:7, "Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."

What do we discover in **John 20**? We see Jesus as the Son of God breathing the life of the Spirit into his disciples. Here is an action that speaks about a new creation. We are being told that this is the new community that God is forming to bring blessing to the world.

Remember this is not the day of Pentecost that we read about in **Acts chapter 2**. This is not the occasion when the disciples are powerfully filled by the Spirit on that unique moment in the life of the church. But this is a highly symbolic action by Jesus that teaches what the life of mission for his followers will be like.

It will not be like getting a super doper toy for Christmas that needs 15 AA batteries but is delivered with none!

No, Jesus sends us out and **supplies** us with the power we need.

We might still feel very weak and inadequate for the task. This is normal. This is because the Holy Spirit doesn't normally stop our knees from knocking together before we speak about Jesus. His normal practice is to empower us in our weakness rather than removing our weakness. So don't wait until the butterflies in your tummy disappear. No, let's trust that the Spirit lives within us and he will help us say what is necessary at the time when we open our mouths.

In Conclusion

We all want peace. Peace is available because of Jesus.

So let's ensure that as the people of God...

- We savour peace
- We speak about peace

Let's pray.