

# **Pentecost – June 9th, 2019**

I begin this sermon today by saying: **"The Peace of the Lord be with you always."** This statement of grace and forgiveness has been spoken to people and in congregations since the time Jesus walked the streets and dusty roads of the Holy Land.

The giving of the peace has become a ritual. And as you know, before the Lord's Supper the pastor blesses the people gathered for worship by saying: "The peace of Christ be with you." And then the people shake hands or do the fist bump and say to others, saying: "Peace be with you" or "And also with you."

This is intended to be more than a friendly gesture or time of conversation. It has its roots in the words of Jesus on the night before his death, and on the day of his resurrection. Jesus wanted us all to know that he was going into death and coming out again – to bring us peace, and all who share a common belief in Jesus share the common peace that Christ gives.

The ritual of the giving of peace of the Lord goes back to the first Easter. Jesus appeared to the disciples in a locked room and twice said: "Peace be with you." Then Jesus sent the disciples to go and share "the peace" to the world by forgiving sins and restoring relationships in his name. And to all of us who know and acknowledge our sin, this greeting is a refreshing shower of grace and harmony.

It is interesting to know that in the early days of the Christian Church – the peace was spoken of at the end of several of the letters of the New Testament. And in early Church worship, all who received the peace – then received the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament... as a means of grace and forgiveness.

This says much about how early Christians lived in a congregation. To them the peace of God was a real thing, expected to be received by everyone, and shared by everyone.

**There was to be "no" withholding of forgiveness between the gathered flock. And if two people would not share the peace, no one could until – those two were brought together for restoration by forgiveness and God's peace.**

So as with last Sunday, fasten your seat belt and open your heart! Hear the words of Jesus who said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." Don't let anything keep you from being at peace with one another; share the peace of Christ and be determined to know the peace that Christ offers.

This reflects the teaching of the Lord's Prayer. We ask that God would forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. **Jesus taught that we are to forgive our brother or sister not only seven times, but seven times seven times. We are always to forgive those who ask for our forgiveness.**

**And here is the bottom line about "THE PEACE, HIS PEACE: To withhold forgiveness is to decline the Lord's forgiveness for ourselves.**

You see, the Easter season for the Christian Church – is filled with the peace of the Lord. His sacrificial death for our sins brings peace where thereonce was guilt and hate and resentment.

The news of his resurrection is to ring in our ears with the words: "He is risen!" "The Peace of Christ be with you always!"

The thought of his body, wounded but now healed and filled with glory, points to the spiritual clothing that God gives to every person in his church. So you see, the time of Easter is one of great joy and peace.

**That peace must be shared among us and between us. Wherever there is division and bad feelings the peace of the Lord must replace it.**

**The truth is, we cannot celebrate the peace of Easter and hold a grudge against a fellow Christian. And if we do hold a grudge, we are only imagining the peace of the Lord. We may mumble the words of peace, but if there is not full forgiveness in the heart, we do not have the peace – that the Lord died to give us.**

And so we come to the text for today. It was the night before Jesus died. With his disciples Jesus washed their feet to show the kind of service he was going to be giving to them. Jesus gave to them the Lord's Supper and told them to continue to celebrate it until the end of time for the forgiveness of sins.

In this context comes the words we hear today. Jesus said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." Jesus clearly wanted us to know that his death would bring us peace and forgiveness and hope. It was his purpose for coming to earth and no opposition to God's will – was to be found in Jesus.

As the spotless Lamb of God, he was the perfect sacrifice for us and our sin. He followed the Father's instructions in every detail. Jesus embraced everything the Father said..., and He was the perfect sacrifice, the true Lamb of God, who came to take away the sin of the world and offers a peace that satisfies a trouble heart.

And you know what else? Knowing that Jesus died and rose to give us eternal life is the most "peace-filled" experience known to humanity.

His peace gives you the strength to cope with any hardship. His peace calms the restless spirit within us. His peace lifts the lowest spirit. His peace is the only true peace we can ever know in this earthly life.

So when you stand in the pew and see me (the pastor) hold out his hands and say: "The peace of Christ be with you always," please know this is more than just a wish. Jesus died and rose to give you this peace... HIS PEACE – and he paid the price – on our behalf.

Even better, when I hold up the bread and the cup, the body and blood of Jesus, know that as your Pastor – I am holding out to you the only true and lasting peace you will ever know in this world. And what greater "peace" is there?

Peace like this gives us the ability to share the peace and forgive one another. And you know what else? We forgive because we are forgiven. We love because Christ loves us. We embrace because we are embraced by God in the person of Jesus Christ.

SO, let us always share the peace of the Lord: that is, let us NOT JUST SAY IT but seek to believe it and experience it – BECAUSE OF HIS PEACE THAT IS IN US.

And now, may the Peace of God that surpasses all understanding... guard and keep your hearts to everlasting life.

Amen.

Pastor Alvin