

**Jesus Is Risen:
He Brings “Easter Peace”
(John 20:1-23)**

---CEFC, 4/17/22

Good Morning.

Ola, como esta.

Ahn-young-ha-se yo

Ni-hao

ah-salam-a-lechum

JAM-bo

Ingoni

Dananish

Did I miss anyone? I'm sure I have.

Every culture has its unique way of expressing a greeting.

Our English "Hello" is of unknown origin,
though many believe it was derived from a wish for good health.

In Mauritania, they might put it the other way around—
saying, "May no evil be on you."

In Botswana, they greet one another by asking "How did you wake?"
(while we often say, "How did you sleep?")

While in Taiwan, the traditional greeting is "Have you eaten?" -- *I like that!*

Over much of the planet, people shake hands when they meet.

In many other cultures, they also kiss.

Some kiss on one cheek, some on both, yet others kiss three times!

Or they may bow.

In Bangladesh, they offer an informal salute with the right hand.

In Cambodia, they put their hands together at their chest like they are praying—

the higher on the chest, the more respect.

I've read about a Filipino tradition

in which you touch the forehead of the person you are greeting with your knuckles.

(I wonder, is that where the expression "knucklehead" comes from?)

Did you know that November 21 is **World Hello Day**?

Who knew?

The objective, I'm told, is to greet ten people on that day.

Somehow that is supposed to contribute to world peace./

I mention these greetings

because you can't help noticing

in John's account of the resurrection appearances of Jesus

the prominence he gives to **the greeting** Jesus extends to his disciples.

Did you see it?

In John 20, which we've just read,

v. 19—"On the evening of that first day of the week,
when the disciples were together,
with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders,
Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

Just two verses later, in v. 21—"Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you!

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Then in v. 26, "A week later his disciples were in the house again,

and Thomas was with them.

Though the doors were locked,

Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

Three times in seven verses—I think there's a message here,

and I don't think that message is simply that Jesus is a friendly guy.

Yes, this was a common greeting—

echoed in both Hebrew and Arabic even today---

Shalom leCHA and *Salam a LECHum*--"Peace be with you."

But this was no common circumstance—

It's not every day you are addressed by someone

who has been resurrected from the dead!

And not only is the repetition a pointer to the deeper significance of these words here,

but so also is the fact that peace has already been an important topic

in Jesus' earlier conversations with his disciples.

Back in chap. 14, Jesus had spoken of it—

14:27—"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."

And in 16:33—"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace."

Now, after the horror of having seen him tortured

and then nailed to a Roman cross to die a horrible death,
in the midst of their dismay and despair,

Jesus says to them, "Peace be with you!"

I suspect that what we have here is more than a mere greeting;

it is a declaration of a new reality—
a reality that flows from Jesus' resurrection from the dead—

Jesus brings

peace.

"Peace be with you!"—These words are significant—

They are full of meaning.

They are a pointer to all that God has done in the resurrection of Jesus.

Having emerged from death to life, Jesus assures his disciples, and us,

that he brings peace.

I call it "**Easter Peace**."

And that's what I want us to consider this morning;

that's what I want us to experience this morning—"Easter Peace"—
the peace that flows from Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

And the first thing we want to do is distinguish this Easter Peace that Jesus brings
from two contrasting views of peace that we find in the world,
for, like the word "love,"
the word "peace" can mean different things to different people.

Jesus himself is very careful to say,

14:27—"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.

I do not give to you as the world gives."

In other words, Jesus says, when I speak about peace

I don't mean the same thing that the world means when it uses that word.

The world's conception of peace often simply means an absence of conflict—

peace is contrasted to war.

As long as no one is fighting, then there is peace.

And even that kind of peace, the world gives very sparingly and fleetingly.

At least since 1939, there has not been one day

without war in some form somewhere in the world.

But Jesus doesn't use the word that way—

His peace, this "Easter Peace," is not simply the absence of conflict.

In fact, paradoxically, what Jesus has done,

and what he brings into the world,

can actually cause conflict.

Jesus was a controversial figure—

some of the things he did and said even aroused hatred—

he was crucified, after all.

And he warned his followers that it would be no better for them—

“If the world hates you,” he told them,

“keep in mind that it hated me first” (Jn. 15:18).

Allegiance to Jesus could create conflict even within families—

setting parents against children and children against parents.

That's what Jesus was getting at when he said,

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth.

I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Mt. 10:34).

So this "Easter Peace" must be more than a mere absence of conflict—

it must be much deeper and richer than that.

It must be something that we experience even in the midst of conflict.

The peace that Jesus gives is not the peace that the world gives.

And though Jesus doesn't address this directly,

I think it's fair to say that this "Easter Peace" is also

not the peace that the false prophets proclaim.

This is a common Old Testament theme—

Often in the Old Testament, we see Israel mired in sin.

They were full of idolatry and injustice and the exploitation of the poor,

but the false prophets just keep telling the people what they want to hear—

"All is well, the Lord is on our side—not to worry."

But the true prophets of God—

prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—

they saw it differently.

Through Ezekiel, the Lord says,

"these false prophets lead my people astray, saying,

"Peace," when there is no peace" (Ezek. 13:10).

Or in Jeremiah--"They dress the wound of my people

as though it were not serious.

'Peace, peace,' they say,

when there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14).

This is not the peace that the Risen Jesus proclaims—

the false peace that is blind to the reality of evil,

the false peace that denies the need for justice.

Referring to these false prophets, Isaiah says,

"The way of peace they do not know;

there is no justice in their paths.

They have turned them into crooked roads;

no one who walks in them will know peace" (Is. 59:8).

There can be no peace where there is no justice--

Is. 48:22--"There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."

The Apostle Paul echoes this theme in the New Testament, saying,

"While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,'

destruction will come on them suddenly,

as labor pains on a pregnant woman,
and they will not escape” (1 Thess. 5:3).

“There is no peace for the wicked.”

The "Easter Peace" that Jesus brings is no superficial cessation of conflict,
nor is it a mere Pollyannish optimism that is blind
to the immoral and unjust realities that exist in this fallen world.

So what is it, then?

What was Jesus pointing to

when he addressed his disciples with the simple words,

"Peace be with you"?

The first aspect of this Easter Peace

deals directly with the issue of justice we just talked about.

Just think of the guilt these first disciples must have felt

as they thought of the events of the last few days.

Jesus had called them to take up their own cross and to follow him—

to give him their absolute allegiance.

They were to remain loyal to him to the end.

He had warned them that whoever denied him before men

he would deny before his heavenly Father.

Yet when the moment of truth came,
and the soldiers appeared in that garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus,
they all abandoned him—they fled in fear like rabbits.
Peter had vowed that he was willing to die for Jesus
then he denied him three times before a servant girl.

Oh, the guilt these disciples must have felt.
How their hearts must have been torn apart by the sense of their own moral failure.

Now they'd heard that he had been risen from the dead—
How could they dare face him?
Would he give them what they deserved—
holding their sins against them?

No, Jesus greeted them with words of grace and acceptance--
"Peace be with you," he declared.
But how could that be?
After all, there can be no peace without justice.

The crucifixion of Jesus was nothing if not unjust.
In fact, you might justly describe it
as the most unjust act in the whole history of the world.

Jesus, the Holy One of God—
the one man who alone among all humans who have ever lived
loved God with his whole heart, soul, strength and mind—
and who lived in loving truth toward everyone he met—

this Jesus was condemned by a Jewish Council and then by a Roman judge
simply for being who he truly was—
the true King of Israel and the divine Son of God.

And for that, he experienced the most barbaric form of execution ever devised by man—
with nails driven into his hands and feet
and left to hang on a cross until he died an agonizing death.

Now that was unjust!

But do you see the difference the resurrection makes to all this?

In raising him from the dead,

God, the supreme Judge, was overruling the human court,

overturning that unjust verdict,

and in a divine reversal, was declaring the truth about Jesus.

In his resurrection, Jesus was vindicated

and was declared to be the Son of God in power.

And suddenly it became clear—

He was innocent;

he didn't die for his own sin—

no, he died for ours.

It was the resurrection that demonstrated this truth—

the truth prophesied hundreds of years before by the prophet Isaiah—

Is. 53:5—**he was pierced for our transgressions,**

he was crushed for our iniquities;

the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,

and by his wounds we are healed."

The Apostle Paul writes:

"God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,
and through him to reconcile to himself all things, . . . ,
by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds
because of your evil behavior.

But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death
to present you holy in his sight,
without blemish and free from accusation—"

And in another place Paul says,

"now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away
have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace"¹

Jesus bears the wrath of God for all those who turn to him in faith—

all those who recognize that he bore what they deserved.

It is true—there is no peace without justice—

but the cross demonstrates God's justice--

and by so doing, it enables him to justify sinners

while still condemning sin—

¹Eph. 2:13

but he takes that condemnation upon himself.

Through faith in Christ, we enter into God's gracious forgiveness.

Rom. 5:1--Therefore, since we have been justified through faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

This Easter Peace is the Peace of God's Wrath Appeased—

our sins forgiven, our guilt gone forever.

"If Christ has not been raised, we are still in our sins," Paul says (1 Cor 15:17).

But Christ has been raised;

he took our sin and guilt upon himself;

our sins have been forgiven;

we have been reconciled to a holy God by the blood of Jesus.

We have peace with God.

Do you feel your own guilt before God?

Do you know that you have not done what you ought to have done

and you have done what you ought not to have done?

Do you ask yourself,

How can I be at peace with a holy and just God?

Jesus Christ died for moral failures like you and me,

and he has been raised from the dead,

and he says to all who come to him in faith, "**Peace be with you.**"

Your sins are forgiven.

Guilt resolved—what a wonderful thing that is.

But there's more to it than that.

These disciples had been cut off from this man they had come to love.

He had loved them as no one ever had or ever could,

and through him, they had experienced, perhaps for the first time,

the very love of God—

they had come to know their Creator as their Father in heaven.

But then Jesus was crucified.

What could it all mean?

Had God abandoned them as he had abandoned Jesus?

Was there even a God at all?—

a God who cares one whiff about what happens

to all us little people down here on earth?

Surely, they must have experienced nothing but a sense of loneliness—

what I'd call cosmic loneliness—

the feeling that when you look up in the stars, there's no one there—

the universe is just a vast expanse of emptiness.

If Jesus could be cut down like that,

what hope could there possibly be for the rest of us?

Was Thomas Hobbes right when he describes the natural state of human life
as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”?

Does evil and injustice rule?

If so, why try to be good? What difference does it make?

Why shouldn't I just look after my own interests

and eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die?

What meaning could there be in a world that crucifies Jesus,

and God does nothing about it?

But the resurrection changed all that—

God hadn't abandoned Jesus to the grave.

And Jesus hadn't abandoned his followers.

He appeared before them with words of assurance—

when he said, "**Peace be with you**"--

This Easter peace was **the peace of God's presence assured**.

"**I am with you always**," he would say to them, "**even to the end of the age**"—

and they could believe it.

He was alive—

he was raised from the dead, never to die again.

Now they knew that nothing—nothing at all—

could separate them from the love of God—ever.

And, in a symbolic act, John tells us that Jesus breathed on them—

"Receive the Holy Spirit," he said—

And by this Spirit, this Comforter,

Jesus would forever make his loving presence felt in their lives.

What about you—

Do you think God has abandoned you?

That he can't be trusted?

That he has left you alone and unloved?

Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead,

and he says to all who come to him in faith, "**Peace be with you.**"

You can know the peace of the presence of God in your life.

You are loved.

Whatever your circumstance,

whatever you may face, you will not face it alone.

What a comfort that is,

what a source of peace.

The resurrection of Jesus is the proof of it—

the assurance of God's presence in our lives.

Guilt, loneliness, abandonment—

surely these were in the hearts of those first disciples

as they gathered together on those first days after the death of Jesus,

but perhaps more than anything, they were wracked by fear and doubt.

Twice John tells us that when they met, they locked the doors.

And why not?

If the powers that be killed their Master, what could they expect?

They were marked men—

accomplices of Jesus' crime,

And if the Lord God would not protect Jesus from their clutches,

what hope would they have?

They feared for their lives.

And Thomas, he was perhaps the most realistic of the bunch—

He'd heard from the witnesses,

but second-hand knowledge was not good enough for him.

If he didn't see it for himself—

and look upon the nail prints in his hands

and put his hand in his side—

he simply would not believe. //

And to these fearful, doubting disciples,

Jesus appears and says, "**Peace be with you.**"

I call this the **peace of God's power displayed.**

For that's what it was.

There's no question about it—

people in the first century knew as well as we do--

dead people do not rise from the dead.

And this was not just a resuscitation—

a temporary reprieve from the inevitable destiny of death.
No, this was something much bigger—

Jesus was raised from the dead, never to die again—

Jesus was raised to a new kind of life—a glorified life,
in a glorified body.

John alludes to it when twice he tells us

that Jesus simply appeared in those locked rooms.

He wasn't just a spirit, a ghost—no, it was really him—

still in some bodily form—the tomb was empty,
but he now existed in a body unlike any we know in this life.

This was a "God-thing"—

a demonstration of a power that can only be described as divine—
it defied all human explanation.

It was this demonstration of divine power in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead
that transformed these fearful, doubting disciples
into a courageous force that changed the world.

There is simply no other explanation.

So do you wrestle with fear?

Some would say that if you are not filled with fear
you're just not paying attention.

There may be truth to that,

inasmuch as studies show that "paying attention"—
that is, consuming "news" in its various forms—

is strongly correlated with increased anxiety levels,
and it is easy to see why.

Fostering fear is click-bait.

Stories that foster fear capture our attention and keep us online—
where ever more articles about all the things we can be fearful about
are put before us.

There's a lot to fear in this life, when you think about it.

A war in Europe—who knows where that is headed?

Instability in the Middle East—that never goes away.

And in the far East, there's the rise of China as a global rival.

Closer to home,

the rise of inflation makes us all poorer.

And the cultural confusion about sex and gender seems out of control—

How will that affect your children, or your grandchildren?

Even today, you might encounter a drunk driver on the Beltway,

or cancer cells may be invading your body.

The list could go on and on.

Who knows what the future holds?

If someone says to you in a moment of crisis,

"Don't worry. Everything's going to be OK,"

would you believe them?

Why should you believe them?

Where do you find security in this life?

What solid rock can you stand on

when everything around you seems shaky and unstable?

What are you looking for to give you courage and confidence?

What would God have to do to assure you that he really is in control,
and that you really are under his providential care?

There are many of us who are like the Apostle Thomas--

**"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, . . .
and put my hand into his side,
I will not believe it."**

Or there's Woody Allen's view--

"If only God would give me a clear sign!
Like making a large deposit in my name at a Swiss bank."

What would it take for you?

"God, if you're there, just give me a sign," we plead.
"Oh God, why do you hide yourself from me?" /

How does God reply to us?

Just look at Jesus--risen from the dead,
the one who says, **"Peace be with you."**

In his resurrection from the dead, we see the powerful hand of God—
a power that is greater than anything this world can throw at us.

Do you see how this releases us from fear?

For what is the worst thing that could happen to you?

What is at the heart of all those things that frighten you—
it's the fear of death.

Isn't that the ultimate fear—the ultimate threat that hangs over our heads
and holds us captive?

But the resurrection of Jesus demonstrates God's power over death itself—
so what's left to fear?

Jesus says to Thomas,
and to us,
"Stop doubting and believe,"

Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead,
and he says to all who come to him in faith, **"Peace be with you."**

16:33-- **"In this world you will have trouble."** Jesus said,
"But take heart! I have overcome the world."

This is the **peace of God's victory begun.**

That's what the resurrection of Jesus means, you see.

Evil doesn't win—God wins—

Jesus has overcome the world—

he has overcome the powerful oppression of the Romans,

he has overcome the religious self-righteousness of the Jewish leaders,

he has overcome the fickle whims of the crowds,

he has overcome the designs of the devil,

and he has overcome the power of sin and death--

Take heart—I have overcome the world, he says.

And the victory we see in Jesus risen from the grave—

is the victory that belongs to all those who trust in him.

He has gone before us to prepare a place for us,

and we shall go with him, if we but hold to him in faith.

Jn. 16:33—"in me you may have peace.

In this world you will have trouble.

But take heart! I have overcome the world."

John 14:27—"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.

I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead,

and he says to all who come to him in faith, "Peace be with you."

The risen Jesus assures us of his peace--

a peace found nowhere else.

The peace that Jesus gives, this Easter Peace,

is not a mere absence of conflict—

but a deep inner peace that transcends all our circumstances.

This peace is not a false peace that is disconnected from justice—

but a peace that reconciles us to a just and holy God,

through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on a cross.

What a change has taken place in our relationship with God!

We need to appreciate that apart from Christ's reconciling work,
we were God's enemies.

Our sin was not just the transgression of some impersonal company policy
or of the institutional laws of the state.

Our sin was a personal offence against God himself.

But through the work of Christ, we obtain not just an uneasy truce
but the real restoration of fellowship
as the source of the hostility (our sin)
has seen dealt with once and for all and has been put away for good.

The judge steps down from the bench

and offers us his friendship and love and even adopts us as his own children.

And we become a part of new family--

this peace introduces us into a new reconciled community called the church,
and it is a peace that will one day embrace all of God's creation.

The Easter Peace that Jesus brings can be found nowhere else. /

As I close, could I get personal?

After all, this is my last opportunity to preach on Easter.

I have been a follower of Christ for close to fifty years,

and I am at a place where I can look back and reflect on the difference

that this Easter Peace that Jesus gives has made in my life.

I think way back of the way this Easter peace helped me
in the highly intense, highly emotional
world of college football.

And in those days, this Easter peace gave me an assurance
that my deepest identity was to be found
not in my performance as an athlete,
whether I succeeded or I failed—
whether I won or I lost.

No, my identity was found in Jesus Christ, raised from the grave.
In Christ, I am a child of God—I am loved,
not because I'm so lovable, but because God is love
and in Christ, he has set his love upon me.
That made a big difference in my life./

Then I think of the intellectual and spiritual challenges I experienced
while studying the Bible in a secular environment in Oxford.
Could all this Christian stuff really be true?

My faith was sustained
because I couldn't get away from
the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus.
He was alive, and I experienced his living presence among the people of God
who worshipped in a church where the Bible was believed and obeyed./

Then Susan and I shared the adventure of raising four boisterous boys—
and I would say that, more than anything,
it was the peace of Christ that enabled us to enjoy

a real peace in our home. /

And then I think of being a pastor, a shepherd of God's flock, these many years—

I have shared in your joys and your sorrows.

And, occasionally, I have seen sheep wander, or get dirty,

and sometimes bite one another,

But only the peace that Christ gives has enabled us to enjoy

a gracious peace together.

May that continue to be so among you, as Paul encourages the Colossians,

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,

since as members of one body you were called to peace” (Col. 3:15)./

And as I grow older,

the ultimate peace that Christ gives has become more and more precious to me—

that peace that the Risen Jesus himself has entered into,

and which he invites us to share—

the peace, that *shalom*, of that new creation in which

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes,

and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Rev. 21:4).

Life can be very hard, but this Easter peace gives me the confidence

that whatever troubles I may face,

the Lord will be there with me.

Since he raised Jesus from the grave,

there is no evil so great, that he cannot overcome it.

I can bring all my fears, all my anxious thoughts to him—my Father in heaven.

I have a future of heavenly glory that will make it all worthwhile.

This world offers nothing like that.

Do you want this peace?

Do you need this peace?

Where will you go to find it?

Many say, look within yourself--

“Withdraw yourself

from the never-ending masquerade of life.

Go within,

there you will find your treasure.”²

But Jesus says, look to me—

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.”

On this Easter day, to all those who turn to him in faith, Jesus says, **“Peace be with you.”**

Prayer

Easter Sunday, 2022

**Jesus Is Risen:
He Brings "Easter Peace"
(John 20:1-23)**

In his Easter account, John makes a point of referring to Jesus' greeting to his troubled disciples: "Peace be with you." This is more than a mere greeting; it is a declaration of a new reality—a reality that flows from Jesus' resurrection from the dead. This morning we want to see and to embrace this "Easter Peace."

I. What This "Easter Peace" Is Not—

A. Not the Peace That the World Gives—

Not a Peace Without Conflict

B. Not the Peace That the False Prophets Proclaim—

Not a Peace Without Justice

II. What This "Easter Peace" Is—

A. The Peace of God's Wrath Appeased

It Resolves Our Guilt,

Offering Forgiveness

B. The Peace of God's Presence Assured

It Relieves Our Loneliness,

Revealing Love

C. The Peace of God's Power Displayed

It Overcomes Our Fear and Doubt,

Giving Courage and Conviction

D. The Peace of God's Victory Begun

It Dispels Our Despair,

Bringing Forth Hope for the Future

Sermon Response:

**Jesus Is Risen:
He Brings “Easter Peace”
(John 20:1-23)**

- If there is no peace for the wicked, how can sinners have the peace that Jesus gives?
How does the resurrection of Jesus demonstrate the justice of God?
- How can the resurrection of Jesus give you the peace of knowing that God will not abandon you?
- What sorts of things cause you to fear? How can the resurrection of Jesus give you the peace that can help overcome your fears?
- How does the resurrection give us assurance that God will be victorious over the evil in this world?
- What does the peace that Jesus gives mean to you? How do you experience it? How do you need to experience it?

