

✠ JOHN 20:19-31 ✠

In Nomine Iesu

In the liturgy of the Lord's Supper we hear the words: "The Peace of the Lord be with you always." It is this peace that our Lord speaks over His disciples here in the upper room where they are behind locked doors because they fear the Synagogue and its rulers.

Peace in the face of death; peace in the face of fear; peace in the face of doubt and uncertainty. Peace be with you.

This is the relation of the Christian with his heavenly Father: peace. The world hates you Christians, and will throw you in prisons, speak evil of you, lie about you, abuse you, and perhaps will even kill your bodies because you are Christian. Peace be with you.

To our fallen and sinful ears it makes no sense. Peace? Life hurts. Peace? I have no friends who care. Peace? My husband hates me. Peace? My wife rejects me. Peace? My children are disobedient and unruly. Peace? What peace?

Here our Lord comforts and consoles us. "My peace I leave with you. No, you will not have peace as the world understands peace, but you will have and do have the peace of God that passes all understanding. You have My peace; the peace of the resurrection."

But in a world where everything revolves around self, this is a moot point. Who cares if I have peace with God when I have bill collectors calling, an unwed pregnant daughter, a son in trouble with the law, a father who beats me, a mother who neglects me, an addiction to alcohol or drugs, to pornography, a broken mind and a suicidal soul?

What good does the peace of the resurrection do me in this troublesome and loathsome life? Sure, it'll be good when I die, I guess, but who knows when that is?

Exactly. Who knows when you will face the last enemy to be destroyed? God does. He knows at what hour the angel of death will pass over your house and touch your mortal flesh and take the breath of life from your lungs. Therefore the peace of the resurrection is the only peace that matters.

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6:33). But so often we have it backwards. So often we strive and yearn for the things of this life that we neglect to stop and listen the voice of our Good Shepherd.

We want peace with our children and so we disobey God's Word, and instead give them what they want on their terms, giving our authority as parents to them, and then wonder why they disrespect us and do not listen, and so there is no peace. We want peace with our neighbors and relatives so we are careful to not offend their sensibilities concerning faith and life. And so we go to great pains to not bring up baptismal regeneration or the presence of Christ in His Supper, closed communion, pastoral authority, an all male clergy, the sin of homosexuality, or anything else that might distance us from others.

Never mind what our Lord says, "I did not come to bring peace on earth, [that is, between

men], but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law” (Luke 12:51-53). We think it is in the name of peace when we follow the lukewarm motto of the lazy: live and let live.

That is not peace; that is merely letting our defenses down so that the devil can infiltrate our strongholds, bind us up, and make us his slaves. But Christ speaks of a different sort of peace when He says to His disciples, “Peace be with you.” He speaks of a peace with God; a peace that passes all understanding because it is a peace that is not ours by nature or by right. It is a peace that God creates, sustains, and delivers. And the reason the world rejects this peace, the reason we often reject this peace, is not because God creates it or sustains it, but because of the method of delivery.

To deliver this peace God must first bring death. Even natural law and reason demonstrate this as the United States fights in the Middle East to bring peace; peace through bloodshed. Kill the enemy and there will be peace. That is true. But the real enemy is not the Muslim or the terrorist, but sin and death. And we Christians are to fight it tooth and claw. But so often we go to war with our own makeshift weapons instead of the double-edged sword coming out of the mouth of our Lord.

The proof is in the pudding. Instead of battling sin with confession and absolution we seek Dr. Phil and the world of psychology to bring peace to our minds. And we Christians have the best Dr. Phil as we make Jesus little more than a teacher of morality and ethics. And so, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” becomes, “Live and let live.” And, “Your faith has made you well,” turns into, “You just gotta have faith.” But what good is it when anyone, Christian or not, can take Jesus’ words and apply them to life? No one rejects the advice columnist Jesus, the loving Jesus, the buddy Jesus, who won’t convict sin and bring division, but who repeats the New Age theme: you’re okay, I’m okay, we’re all okay.

We do whatever it takes – clothes, speech, behavior, attitude, toys, whatever – to try and convince the world that we are not knocking on death’s door; that we are going to the grave with dignity and at peace with the enemy. But truth be told, we are scared out of our minds. We know that we all have one foot in the grave. In fact, it might be said that we are all already dead, but that our bodies, like chickens with their heads cut off, just haven’t given up yet. And so we lock ourselves in the upper room, afraid of the enemy.

But our Lord comes and gives us the medicine of salvation and eternal life. He fought the fight for us; the enemy is destroyed. Where, O Death is your sting? He does what no doctor can do: He doesn’t just resuscitate your body; He gives you new and everlasting life.

Ah, but there’s the rub. “You say so pastor, and I want to believe you, it sounds wonderful. But I just can’t believe it without seeing it.” Such are the words of Thomas. “Unless I see the proof, the nail marks and the pierced side, I will not believe it.”

Repent. Do not doubt, but believe and you will be blessed. For blessed are you who believe but have not seen. Blessed because our Lord did not say those who believe will never see; He said blessed are those who believe without seeing. And what better blessing is there than to see our Lord and our God face to face?

Our Lord showed the disciples the marks of the nails in His hands and feet, and the hole in

His side, so that they would believe the witness of others. But we, by the Holy Spirit, believe the witness of others, and so our Lord blesses us by showing to us the marks of the nails and the hole in His pierced side.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the day of His resurrection, when He appeared to His disciples behind closed doors, showed them His pierced hands and feet, the stigmata of the cross. “This is my body, which was given into death for you; the holes you see drained my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. I am the Crucified One. I died and behold, I am alive forevermore.”

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16)? Our Risen Lord does not leave us in doubt or fear, but appears in the midst of us and says, “Peace be with you. Look here, this is my body given into death for you. This is my blood, shed for the remission of your sins. Do not doubt, but believe.

“Peace be with you. You who are heavy-laden with your sins; you who are defiled by the lusts of the flesh; you whose faith is small and weak; fear not, for I am the First and the Last, I am the Alpha and the Omega, I died and I am alive, and I hold the keys of Death and Hades.

“Peace be with you. I have done these things, died and risen again, given you my flesh to eat and my blood to drink, so that you may believe and by believing, that you may have life in my name.”

The peace of the Lord be with you always. Amen.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠