

John 20:19 Peace, what a beautiful thing.

On the evening of the first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said: Peace be with you.

Oh what peace we often forfeit; of what needless pain we bear; all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer. Jesus speak your word of peace to us again today.

It's one thing for Jesus to say 'Peace be with you', it's another thing to experience and face financial worries, work stresses and family conflicts.

The disciples longed for peace. How could they find it? If someone has the answer to that I guess they'd be worth a mint. You see, the more you try to get this deep, inner peace, the more it seems to elude you. Peace, what a beautiful thing, but oh so hard to believe.

The disciples were a troubled scared weak bunch of men who craved for peace. They had failed to stand by Jesus at the crucifixion when he needed them most. They disowned him. Now they were imprisoned in fear behind locked doors for fear of the Jews.

Fear can paralyse the bravest and ruin our lives. The disciples would've given their eye-teeth to have peace. But that seemed impossible. Perhaps you've experienced those times.

Suddenly the risen Lord was in their midst. More fear. What would he say to them? They were guilty and knew it. Amazingly, Jesus' first word to them was peace. Peace be with you. What a relief. What grace and mercy! Then he showed them his wounds. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw him. Peace was such a beautiful thing for them. Yet their greatest need was not peace, but Jesus. When he was in their midst, they had peace, joy, confidence, life and all they needed.

It's amazing how many times Jesus came to his followers when they were stressed out in stormy seas and troubled by lots of cares, and his first word to them was fear not, peace, why are you troubled, oh you of little faith. When they heard his voice they were at peace.

Here we learn that peace is not in our power. It's the gift from God. The church has the only solution to the world's troubles. It's the Gospel. It's Jesus and his word. The church should be worth a mint, or crowded out from people coming to receive this grace gift; to hear Jesus. Peace comes from knowing that Jesus has defeated all the evil that ruins our lives. When he was raised from the grave, God was no longer angry over sin. Jesus has paid the price that enables God to be our friend. That's why we have peace.

The resurrection message is all about: don't be afraid, don't worry; I'm the Lord; be at peace because I'm with you. What a beautiful thing peace is. And what a greater treasure Jesus is. If only we believed his word. When we're restless and troubled, let's listen again to His word. Let's seek his face.

The peace of the Lord comes to you from the word of God. As you hear and trust that word, the Holy Spirit comes to work faith in your heart and calm your troubled lives. Peace is a fruit of the Spirit: Love, joy, peace. It's all free and undeserved. The Spirit brings Jesus into your life, to be with you and for you, and to show you that he's real. What a wonderful gift Easter is.

You all know about that peace, yet your lives are often crippled by fear, worry and a lack of peace. It's hard to believe his word. While you know that Jesus walks with us, yet when we need him most, he seems to have forsaken you. Oh what little faith we have. If only Jesus were real for us, we'd be more than conquerors of all the challenges we face.

I want you to note that when the risen Lord appeared to the fear-filled disciples and spoke his word of peace to them, nothing changed – yet everything changed - for them. The powerful Jews were still a threat and yet all had changed in their minds. Not even the threat of death could deter them. It all happened when Jesus became real for them. That's how it is for you when you see Jesus. Do you see how blessed you are to have the risen Lord walk with you every day. And yet, I guess, like me, you so often focus on your troubles and not the Lord. Oh what peace we often forfeit. Ask the Lord to open your faith eyes to see him. You see Him with your ears.

The peace of the Lord is not just for you. Jesus so loved the world that he gave his life that the world might have peace. Jesus said: as the Father sent me to bring you peace, so I'm sending you as bringers of peace to a troubled world. And with that he breathed on them and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone their sin, they are forgiven. In other words, peace comes through forgiveness. As you are forgiven and go out forgiving others, caring and serving them, you'll bring peace and hope to the guilty and hurting.

Every day, as you know that Jesus walks with you, the Holy Spirit will spread the aroma of peace to those around you. And remember what made the disciples glad - it was when Jesus showed them his wounds – not His perfect life, but his scars. When people see that you are scared by sin, when they see your struggles, guilt, conflicts, broken marriages and failings, and when they see you turning to Jesus for hope and healing, they'll get the message that Jesus is your secret to life. Your strengths may impress people; but it's your scars that have been touched by Jesus that will draw others to him. It's your sins that you've been open and honest about that best show the grace of Jesus. Let me ask again: when you're plagued with worry, conflicts everywhere and you're struggling to cope, what then?

Flee to Jesus. Cling to his promise. In this life you'll always be afflicted with something. This is not just the devil's doing. God lets it happen to force you to keep turning to Jesus and crying for mercy. If you weren't troubled, you'd soon forget Jesus and go it alone. God uses those difficulties for good. They keep you dependent on Jesus.

The good news is that Jesus is still Lord. The place where he most clearly comes into your midst is here in worship - as he came to the disciples. Sometimes I feel that we've lost this sense of awe and holiness of God in worship. Yet here he speaks his word to break open your prison of fear or despair by saying your sins are forgiven.

Go in peace; he does it. Take note how often the word of peace comes through your worship. The peace of the Lord be with you. The peace of the Lord that passes all understanding keep guard over your hearts. You're even sent out with the blessing of peace. Worship is a reflection of what happens in heaven. God is here. You're surrounded by angels and the whole host of heaven praising the Lord. The high point is where the living Jesus comes to you in the bread and wine at the altar when you celebrate it. There he comes into your life to give you peace.

What a gift. Jesus is really there for you, even if you can't physically see him. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe, Jesus said to Thomas; as he says it also to you. Thomas responded “My Lord and my God” Jesus got through to him. The scars reassured him.

My dear people, what a beautiful thing God's peace is. It's not that anything necessarily changes, it's just the way you see it. You can do all things through Christ who gives you strength. This peace comes from knowing that the risen Lord is with you always. That's his resurrection word to you.

And in Matthew, it's his last word to you: I'm with you always, to help you in your life; I'm with you to forgive you when you're guilty, to comfort you when you're down, to defend you in your trials, to grow peace in your anxiety. If God is for you, who can be against you? What a beautiful thing it is to know that Jesus is real, with you and for you.

You'd have to be the most blessed of people. Amen