

Sermon: My peace I give to you

Reading: John 20:19-

Introduction

There is a proverb which is helpful to apply when a conversation is difficult and relationships are feeling tense and challenging. The proverb says, 'A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit' (**Pro 15:4**). Another way of saying this would be a gentle word offers life and fruit from a good tree which will grow strong whereas a careless, critical or deceitful words will crushes the spirit and demoralise.

Im sure we can all think of occasions when we have received both a harsh word of criticism and maybe a word of undeserved grace. One crushes and the other builds relationship and heals wounds. We can probably all recall times when we have been critical and have not been gracious when a gentle word would have helped more than the harsh words we used! Gentle words which bring calmness and tenderness to a tense situation and act like a balm, soothing and healing. Jesus appears to His disciples after His resurrection with a soothing, calming words, simply saying, "Peace be with you".

Context

John has spent 5 chapters covering the last 24 hours of Jesus life. The final two chapters of John's Gospel are concerned with Jesus resurrection. This is the central point of our faith. If Jesus did not rise, St. Paul says, 'If there is no resurrection, we are to be pitied above all people'. However the final two chapters focus on Jesus risen life, gloriously changed, exchanged mortality for immortality, the terminal body, cursed with entropy for one of eternal life. Now the humble servant has resurrected to our eternal reigning King.

The disciples have not fully realised what has taken place yet, they are still in their gloom. They are currently in a state of confusion and bewilderment, with more questions than they have answers for! Since Gethsemane the disciples have been keeping a low profile. All seemed lost and all the plans the disciples were making have come to naught. How did it all go so horribly wrong?

Having witnessed Jesus crucifixion, the soldiers spear thrusting into the side of Jesus ensuring death had come, blood and water flowed from His side, He was indeed dead. The disciples thought it just couldn't get any worse. The joy of the past three years had come to an abrupt and untimely end, it was all over! Each of the disciples were reeling with grief and sorrow, mixed with self loathing, knowing they had let Jesus down by abandoning Him. Surly it cant get any worse?

But it did get worse, a lot worse! They had heard the testimony of the women who went to the tomb to prepare the body of Jesus for burial, but discovered the tomb was empty. Although the women conveyed what they saw and heard, of a young man dressed in white proclaim, 'Jesus has risen', it just seemed like nonsense to them. Who then could possibly have taken the body and why? Was it the Pharisees, the chief Priests or Elders? This seems highly unlikely as they were the ones who insisted the tomb be sealed and deploy guards at the tomb. No! It was not the religious leaders, they wanted Jesus out of the way and they had succeeded (or so they thought!). What about the soldiers? This is even more unlikely as their job was to guard the tomb to ensure no one could possibly tamper with the body laid in the tomb. What a strange assignment they must have thought this was, guarding a dead man!

The evening had drawn in quickly and the disciples gathered together. They were frustrated by all these events and scared. A body simply cannot vanish, they knew there would be serious consequences once the authorities discover the empty tomb. There would be a hunt to track down the culprits and the disciples knew they would be blamed for stealing Jesus body. How could anyone think such a thing, all the disciples wanted to do was to lay their beloved friend, their teacher and lord to rest.

Its true what they say, the darkest hour is just before dawn. This was their darkest hour and what utter misery filling that hour. But as the sun rises in the sky and the darkness recedes, so their hour of deepest darkness was about to be broken with a ray of light, which would pierce the darkness and gloom. The light grows and darkness flees. The shaft of light began with soothing words from a familiar voice, 'Peace be with you'

Peace be with you

Its familiar and wonderfully soothing voice. Everyone looks on in complete and utter amazement as they hear again the same words repeated. The darkness is broken and light has broken through. How quickly the darkness flees when light enters.

Its Jesus who is speaking and His words are like a soothing balm, 'Peace be with you' (**John 20:19**). They couldn't believe their ears, never mind their eyes! The disciples must have thought their grief was playing a mind game on them! Only everyone was seeing the same thing and hearing the same words. This is no grief stricken hallucination.

Jesus knows how hard this must be for them. I can imagine Him smiling, as the disciples stand frozen in time, with jaws dropping in complete amazement. This is just too much for the brain to process and take in. So Jesus speaks the same words, repeating the same beautiful words of grace, 'Peace be with you'.

How hard it must have been for these men to look Jesus in the eye, knowing they had let their friend down. The women by contrast quickly run to Jesus to seize hold of Him, not wanting to let Him out of their grasp again.

The proverb of a gentle word is so wonderfully soothing when applied. The disciples are already crushed in spirit. They are feeling the weight of shame on their backs as Satan taunts them for having let Jesus down, how unworthy they really are. Jesus will not want anything to do with you! You can imagine Satan's taunts. How often have we heard these words spoken to us in our guilt and shame?

And yet, such amazing grace, Jesus is not angry with the them, nor does He chide them for their lack of faith, He does not rebuke them for running out on Him and He does not condemn them for their rejection of Him, Jesus simply says, 'Peace be with you'.

Have you truly experienced the peace which comes through sweet fellowship with Jesus? Peace of heart, peace in our soul and peace of mind is a most blessed state indeed. The world is constantly searching for peace, but only ever finds a shallow, temporary appeasement which relieves the mind for a time from worry, but does not settle the restless heart and soul. When Jesus gives His peace, it's not as the world give peace. Jesus peace is a deep and wondrous joy, a joy unspeakable, a delight, a lightness in our spirit which produces an unbelievable calmness, even when everything seems to be falling apart around us. Jesus peace is a wonderful warming and comforting peace, which comes with a realisation that things are going to be ok, because God has it covered.

The world cannot manufacture this depth of peace, its supernatural, it's Godly, it's Holy and its Pure. Thats why the world cannot copy it, mimic it, multiply it, manufacture it or steal it. The peace which Jesus gives is a peace that passes all understanding. This peace is the one experience every restless soul struggles to find and always comes up empty

until the heart humbles itself before Jesus, for he is the only One who can give this peace we so desperately need, we must humble ourselves in repentance before Jesus.

Be a people who share the Peace

Jesus has set for us an example we are to follow and be a people who do as our Jesus has done, share the peace. This is a valuable lesson to remember and what better time to remember to share the peace of the Lord with others, than when we partake of the Holy Sacraments? This is the Lord's table of fellowship and peace must not be withheld from true believers as we share together.

When we gather for the breaking of bread together, there must not be any grievances in the body of Christ between the believers. If one believer has something against another, or if one believer knows another holds something against us, we are to go to that person and offer the hand of fellowship and sort out the grievance and be at peace with one another before we break bread together. This is what Jesus is demonstrating here.

This is why we use these very words before we come to the table of fellowship saying, 'Peace of the Lord be always with you'. The response should always be, 'And also with you'. So many misunderstand this part of the service and think it's simply a quick catch up time with friends. Actually it's the opposite, we are to offer peace with those who we have found friendship broken, tense or difficult - these are the ones we are to meet first as a priority and share a genuine peace, not a superficial half hearted peace. It must come from the heart. Remember our Lord Jesus sees everything, we do not fool Him.

Jesus has already shown us the depth of love before breaking bread by the washing the feet of His disciples. We are to have this love for one another. Consider what this cost Jesus? He knew the heart of each person whose feet He was washing and yet did not hold back from washing Peter's feet or even the feet of Judas who He knew would betray Him. Can you imagine, humbly washing the feet of the one you know is going to betray you? Jesus tenderly and compassionately washes each foot.

As Jesus stands in the locked room, everyone wondering how can this be? Jesus offers His 'Peace' to them. The next time we gather at the table to receive the Holy Sacraments, consider what the words Holy Communion truly mean! Look around at those we gather with, are there any who we are not in good fellowship with? Then make peace before receiving the bread and wine, as Jesus demonstrated so wonderfully for us to do.

Be at Peace

As the disciples were still trying to comprehend how a person who had suffered such mortal wounds, no body could survive, never mind revive. But here stands Jesus, upright, tall, at peace and even smiling at them as He looks at each one and with soothing words, 'Peace be with you'. Knowing they are doubting in their minds, this cannot possibly be Jesus, He shows them His scars. This is remarkable in itself. Jesus is not a wounded victim of a Roman failed execution. No! Jesus is not in trouble, struggling to stand, hunched over in pain, He is Risen, gloriously resurrected, hallelujah.

Our glorified Saviour still bears the scars in His eternal body. The scars will for all time demonstrate what the true price was for Jesus to redeem each of us, from the wages of sin, so we could be at peace with God.

The Scriptures tell us the our God has our name engraved on the palms His hands. When we stand before Almighty God and Satan our accuser stands beside us and presents a water tight case of my sin, guilt and shame to the judge, then I have a wondrous hope as Jesus raises up His hand to silence Satan, as the scars are revealed,

those wondrous scars which boldly declare my debt has been paid. I hear the words 'telestai' which is the words Jesus used on the cross as He shouted with His last breath before He died. It's a triumphant shout which means, the debt is paid in full. My sin has been cast into hell with the death sentence Jesus took for me and His righteousness has been given to me.

Oh what great comfort we have as God's people in the saving work of Christ and His blood shed for me, washing me whiter than snow. I awoke this morning to these words which I used to sing as a new Christian and each passing year they have a greater depth of meaning than they did at first,

It's Your Blood that gives me life
It's Your Blood that took my place
In redeeming sacrifice, Washes me,
Whiter than the snow, than the snow
My Jesus, God's precious Sacrifice.

Can you imagine the singing, praising, hugging and tears of the disciples seeing their Lord has risen, conquering both sin and death? Now they understand what Jesus meant when He told them that He must die but in three days He will rise. Can you imagine the questions and dancing around the room in ecstasy that the disciples must have been experiencing as Jesus shared His peace with them in the knowledge, He has risen. No wonder the Easter praise shout is, 'He has risen indeed, Hallelujah'.

Tellers of the peace

Verse 23 has caused a little confusion, Jesus tells the disciples they have the power to forgive sins or seemingly to withhold forgiveness from others of their sins. Its important to remember, only God forgives sins. The key to understanding this verse lies in the previous two verses, "Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that He breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' Jesus was preparing to send the disciples out into the world with the good news. Jesus has also given us this 'Great Commission' today. He is sending us out, to bring the 'Good News' of the way to salvation and heavens Kingdom to the those in our generation.

Jesus knows we cannot do this work in our own strength because it's a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, in order to turn a heart of stone into a heart warmed towards God. This is what the verse about forgiving and withholding forgiveness means, as we proclaim the gospel, we are to convey to the repentant sinners how God has forgiven them their sins through the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross and they can now be forgiven. This means once the person has truly repented they have now been received by God and are at peace with God, Peace of the lord be always with you! This is the work of the Holy Spirit and the message of the church. By contrast this also means just as the disciples were able to tell those who refused to repent of their sins that they remained in sin and therefore were unforgiven and stand condemned in God's eyes. Jesus said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" **(John 3:36)**.

When we come to Holy Communion be sure we are at peace with each other and with God. The Scriptures say, 'If we say we love God but hate our brother, we are liars and no truth is in us. God looks at the heart and actions, not simply our words. It's important we have a living, genuine faith: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers" **(1 John 3:14)**. May the peace of the Lord be always with you. **Amen**

Hallelujah Christ has risen.....He is risen indeed Hallelujah