

Well, Easter has come and gone for another year. By now, you have probably put away all your Easter decorations until next year. Worship services are back to normal; the church has gone back to business as usual until Christmas. But as I have said before, every Sunday should be celebrated as Easter; so, we must be careful not to become complacent and forget the real reason why we call ourselves Christians, and what we learned from our Lenten study on the Early Church. The Lord has risen; He has risen indeed. The Resurrection is the key to our faith and hope.

Following His resurrection from the grave, Jesus appeared numerous times to His disciples and many other people during the forty days between the Resurrection and His ascension back into heaven to demonstrate that He had truly risen. This morning I would like to look at two of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances and see what we can learn from them and apply to our daily lives. The first appearance occurs on Easter evening in the Upper Room after Jesus had appeared to two believers on the Road to Emmaus. The Upper Room was where Jesus had shared the Lord's Supper with His disciples on the night that He was arrested, and where the disciples were gathered following the Resurrection trying to make sense of all that was happening. I will be reading from the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Luke, verses 36 through 49.

Read Luke 24:36-49

It was the week after the resurrection, and the disciples were still scattered all about Jerusalem and the surrounding villages. John searched high and low for Peter, and finally found him still hanging out in the Upper Room. "Peter, Peter!" he said excitedly. "I have good news and bad news. Which would you rather hear first?" "By all means give me the good news. We've had enough bad news lately," Peter replied. "The good news is Christ is risen," John said. "That's great!" said Peter. "Now what's the bad news?" John paused and said: "Well, He's really ticked off about last Friday."

Someone once said that if he had been Jesus, he would have done the post-resurrection appearances a little differently. First, he would have gone to the house of the High Priest and scared the living heck out of him, and then after spooking him for a while, he would have gone to the palace of the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate and made him wash his hands again and again. Then he would have gone to the barracks of the Roman soldiers who mocked and crucified Him, and showed them what a real King looked like up close and personal. He said that he would have had a lot of fun on Easter morning. However, Jesus had another purpose, a more serious one – that of making true believers out of His followers and preparing them to carry on His ministry here on earth.

As you study the accounts of Jesus' appearances following the Resurrection, you find that things were happening fast. The disciples during this time are an interesting study in human behavior. You remember that when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, they all ran for the hills leaving Jesus alone to face the soldiers and the trial. Peter and John followed but at a distance, and entered the courtyard of the High Priest where Jesus was being interrogated. This is where Peter fulfilled Jesus' prophecy and denied that he was one of Jesus' disciples not once, but three times. During the crucifixion, Luke tells us that those who knew Jesus stood at a distance.

It appears that the most appropriate words to describe the disciples during this time are "at a distance." This might explain why the doors of the Upper Room were locked. They were scared for their lives and wondered what was going to happen next. They were listening in terror for every foot step on the stairs outside the Upper Room, and for every knock on the door, lest they too might be arrested by the religious authorities and crucified. Even though several of their group had already seen Jesus alive that day, they still had some doubts and didn't want to take any chances. This resurrection stuff was still Greek to them. They were confused about what was going to happen next and what the future held for them.

Suddenly Jesus appeared in their midst and gave them the normal Eastern greeting of "Peace be with you," which means "May God give you every good thing." Now remember that the door was locked and Jesus just walked right through the door and stood before them. I bet their eyes were like a deer in headlights and you could have heard a pin drop on the floor. And I also bet you that if Jesus had shouted "Boo" they would also have gone right through that door without opening it with Peter leading the way.

Because of their behavior the previous week, they may have been expecting a tongue lashing, criticism, or anger from Jesus. After all they had abandoned Jesus and ran for the hills when the Temple police came to arrest Him; Peter had denied knowing Him three times; and they all had stood at a distance when He was crucified. Only the women had gone to the tomb on the third day to complete the burial preparations. No one believed Him when He said would rise from the grave. When we are betrayed, hurt, and doubted, our natural tendencies are anger and bitterness, but not Jesus, He came to show us God's love, and set the example for us to follow.

Jesus came to them and offered them peace. His greeting of "Peace be with you" goes beyond the casual greeting of peace on someone. Throughout His ministry, Jesus spoke of a peace that believers could experience with God and themselves. His was the peace that He promised in John 14:27 when He said: "Peace, I leave you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." The peace which the world offers us is a peace of escape; a peace that comes from avoiding trouble and refusing to face

the facts. However, Jesus is offering a peace that no experience in life can take from us. It is peace that no sorrow, no danger, or no suffering can destroy. It is not dependent on outward circumstances, what's happening around us. It is peace in the eye of the storm.

This is the peace of mind that the Apostle Paul discusses in Philippians 4:7 when he wrote: "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." In other words, it is a peace beyond human logic. This does not mean that we can't understand or analyze it. But that the peace of God is so precious that our mind with all its skills, imagination, and creativity can never produce. We can't achieve it on our own; it is a precious gift from God.

Now this is not a peace without problems, but one that sees you through the troubles of life. This peace is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of God no matter the conflict. It is like the peace that God gave Noah when the flood waters kept rising; David when he saw the size of Goliath; Daniel in the lion's den; and Jesus when He headed for the cross. And it is the very same peace that God offers to us this morning.

This is the peace that comes when we let go of our hurts, disappointments, and worries, and give them to the Lord. In other words: "Let go, let God!" Someone once said that "sometimes God calms the storm, and sometimes He lets the storm rage and calms His child." When asked what is peace, a little boy replied: "Peace is when you feel all smooth inside." As with the disciples, this peace is available to us today, to all of us who are dealing with hurts, bitterness, problems, and the demands of life. Peace rules the day when Christ rules the heart.

Now the second Resurrection appearance of Jesus focuses on Peter. If you remember on the night that Jesus was arrested and put on trial before the Jewish religious leaders, Peter followed at a distance and when asked if he was a follower of Jesus, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times. In his gospel, the Apostle Luke tells us that when Peter denied Jesus the third time, Jesus looked directly at Peter; in other words, He looked him straight in the eye. Have you ever wondered what that look felt like? Was there anger, hurt, betrayal, disappointment or was it the look that many of us husbands have gotten over the years; you know, the "I told you so" look.

Well, based on a story from the twentieth-first chapter of the Gospel of John, I believe it was a look of love and compassion; one that all of us who have been hurt or betrayed should try to follow. In this story from John, some of the disciples following Peter's suggestion had gone fishing, back to their old profession. Like most of my fishing trips, they didn't catch anything all night. Early in the morning, they heard a voice from the shore telling them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. When they did, they caught so many fish that the nets almost broke. When they reached the shore, they found Jesus cooking breakfast for them. What a sight, the

Son of God, the Messiah, the recently crucified and newly raised from the dead Savior cooking and serving up breakfast.

As Peter sat around the fire eating his breakfast, he must have thought back to the night he sat around the fire in the courtyard of the High Priest and now wondered what Jesus was going to say to him. Then Jesus took Peter aside for a private conversation. Peter must have been thinking, here's it comes; I'm going to get it now. But Jesus, full of love and compassion, only asked Peter three times "do you love me?" By asking the question three times, in a sense Jesus canceled the denials and restored Peter to his role as the rock of the church.

Think what would have happened if Jesus had criticized Peter. Peter might have gone back to fishing and we would have never heard of him again. His gifts and potential as one of Jesus' disciples would have been wasted. But Jesus saw great potential in this hard headed fisherman and restored him, renewed His faith in Peter and his mission as a fisher of men.

Not only did Jesus forgive the disciples and Peter, but His love extended to all, even those who crucified Him. Remember that while He was dying on the cross Jesus said: "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." On the cross, dying for our sins, He prayed for forgiveness; forgiveness for Peter's denial, the disciples abandoning Him, Judas' betrayal, Pilate's compromise, and our sins. He set the example for finding peace in a world without a conscience – He forgave and prayed.

On that cross, Christ set a precedent for all time. He illustrated by His death all that He had proclaimed during His ministry here on earth. Some people say that the teachings and moral conduct of Jesus Christ are too idealistic and cannot be practiced, but here we see Him showing that it can and must be practiced if we are to be His true disciples. Jesus loved instead of retaliating; He prayed rather than condemning; and He forgave because He loved.

I think that all of us will admit that when we are mistreated, we find it difficult to have the mind of Jesus and to practice the forgiveness that He demonstrated. Now it's important to note that Jesus did not suggest that we suppress our hostile feelings and ignore the injuries and mistreatment that we experience at the hands of others. To do so would create a poison within our minds that would eventually produce an eruption. Neither are we to retreat into self-pity which leads to discouragement, despair, and depression.

However, there are many reasons why we should forgive. First, to limit or to refuse to forgive prevents a person from living the principle of love Jesus taught. Secondly, limiting forgiveness causes us to be preoccupied with the faults and mistakes of others to the extent that we become blind to our own shortcomings. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." And finally, limiting forgiveness places

the present and the future under the weight of the past. While it may be difficult to forgive those who have offended us, the consequences of not forgiving are much greater.

Two little boys returned to their separate homes after a fight. One declared to his mother that he would never speak to the other boy again as long as he lived. The next day the mother caught the two boys playing together as if nothing had happened. When she questioned her son about his vow to never speak to his friend again, the boy replied: "Oh, me and Johnny are good forgetters." Are we good forgetters?

According to tradition, when the artist Leonardo da Vinci was painting his masterpiece *The Last Supper*, he had a furious quarrel with a friend. In anger he made up his mind to draw the man's face as the portrait of Judas, the traitor. But then he found that he could not paint the face of Jesus. Time after time he tried and failed. At last, he regretted his harsh treatment of his friend and erased the face of Judas from the canvas. That night, he had a dream in which he saw more vividly than ever the form and face of the Savior, and on the next day he completed his masterpiece.

We shall never be able to experience the presence and the peace of the Risen Lord in our lives as long as we harbor resentment, hatred, and revenge in our hearts. To be one of Jesus' disciples, we must love and forgive as He forgave; then we will know the peace that passes all understanding. Let me conclude with this statement: "No (N-o) Jesus, no peace; know (k-n-o-w) Jesus, know Peace!" Peace comes only from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Do you have that peace? Do you want peace in your life? Then open your heart to Jesus and let Him be part of your life. Remember peace rules the day when Christ rules the heart! Amen