

Jesus Marvelously Gives Us Peace

Acts 3:12-20

Easter 2

April 8, 2018

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What gives you peace? What is it that you look to, to find a sense of calmness and happiness? For some it is that vacation spot. For others it is doing the work they love. Still more when they are with family and friends. And there are some that find peace simply by sitting in front of the television set watching their favorite show or movie or sports.

Maybe a few of these options were what you were thinking of or maybe your source of peace wasn't even mentioned. The truth is, we all want to be at peace. When we are in a peaceful state life is good, we seem to be in control, and at the very least, there are no problems we are currently going through.

In the Gospel lesson today, we heard Jesus tell his disciples, "peace be with you." The disciples didn't really feel all that peaceful up to that moment. Their lives were on one big roller coaster ride and it didn't seem to be ending anytime soon. They watched their master get arrested, betrayed by one of their own. They saw him declared guilty by a make-believe trial. They saw him die on a cross amidst darkness and loneliness. Now they were hearing that his body was gone maybe even alive!

Their lives were not peaceful until they saw for themselves that Jesus was alive. Maybe that is why Thomas had such a hard time believing it. It was too good to be true. He just had to see it, so he could be at peace. Jesus gave them peace by his resurrection. This type of peace isn't found in anything just mentioned nor is it achieved by any conventional way. Everything that caused the disciples to be without peace was designed to give them peace. It does seem all backwards, but the results are amazing.

Our God still gives us peace in the same way. But, the peace that is achieved is greater than other forms of peace we could ever hope to find because Jesus marvelously gives us peace. The context of this lesson in Acts is rather amazing. The church was growing after the mass conversion at Pentecost. Peter and the other disciples were growing bolder and bolder in their preaching of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

One day as Peter and John are going into the Temple to pray and witness to their faith they meet a man who was a cripple. He must have been known because he was usually there and the people all knew him. He was there looking for money to make his life a little easier. When he met Peter and John, Peter gave him so much more. He healed him in the name of Jesus. A man who couldn't walk and had to be carried was leaping for joy in the Temple courts. This of course caused a commotion and brought a gathering to Peter. Peter therefore takes the opportunity to witness again.

As the people gather Peter tells them: ***"Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"***

We might wonder why Peter starts off this way. Shouldn't the people be surprised that Peter was able to do this? This was a miracle. Yet, Peter wonders why they are shocked. His point is really that these people at the Temple that day were not very far removed from Jesus' days in the Temple. Jesus did the same thing and Jesus explained that he was able to do this because he is the promised Messiah.

Peter as Jesus' disciples is wondering why the people should be surprised that God wouldn't use his disciples to continue the work Jesus started. Peter explains further: ***¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.***

Peter reminds them of Jesus and then gets to the heart of the matter. The reason God allowed his early church to perform all kinds of signs and wonders was to give an opportunity to preach God's Word. If Peter only focused on the man healed or how God can do this, he would have missed his opportunity.

Peter first gets to the heart of the Law. Jesus died because of us. The people hadn't forgotten the injustice served to Jesus. He was innocent and loved by the people and yet the people were led to turn on him to the point that they called for the salvation of a murderer instead of asking for Jesus' life to be spared.

It was ironic that it was a pagan leader in Pilate who didn't care for God or his word showed more mercy on Jesus than the very people of God who knew the law and knew how God would feel over the death of an innocent man. Everything was all backwards.

It was worse than that. Peter reminds them of who Jesus is: The Author of Life. God himself, the one promised to Abraham. The Servant of the Lord who was said to come by Isaiah was killed by the people. They were guilty of the worse injustice. They turned on their God.

That is what makes Good Friday so hard to talk about and watch. It is the injustice of it all. We still hear the outcries of injustice in the news today. We are a people who feel that justice should prevail and that no one should get away with crime especially murder. It should have been the Jews on the cross and not Jesus. It should have been the Roman soldiers on the cross and not Jesus. But we can go farther than that. It should have been us on the cross and not Jesus.

We too are guilty of what happened to Jesus. We caused Jesus' death. We killed the Author of Life. He went there to pay for our sins too. We add to the weight he felt on the cross every time we sin. It was our sin that put him there. We broke the law, we despised our God's will, we turned our backs on his will, and Jesus was punished instead of us.

It all does seem to be backwards, at least to us. To God everything was going according to plan.

Peter elaborates: ¹⁷ ***“Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸ But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer.***

What did Isaiah say would happen to the Servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ? He would be crushed for our iniquities to bring us peace. God wanted it to be all backwards so that we could be saved and made right with God.

How can we truly sleep well at night? How can we truly be content with what we have? How can we be so joyful even when the world is falling apart? It all seems backwards that we should be at peace, but it is because Jesus did the opposite of what justice demanded. If God was truly fair, we all would be left to suffer hell with the devil for all eternity. If God were fair he wouldn't love us. If God were fair, we could never find true peace. Yet, God isn't fair when it comes to his treatment of us. Sin was punished by our Just Lord. It was punished in Christ and not us.

The people really didn't know what they were doing when they called for Jesus' life and we don't realize just how much pain we are causing by our many sins. That doesn't excuse our sins and it didn't excuse their sins. Peter tells them how to view their sinfulness: ¹⁹ ***Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰ and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.***

When we run to Jesus who did the opposite of what should have happened we will find forgiveness. The one who went to the cross for you tells you to run to him for help and mercy. Do you think he will give it to you? Do you think he will forgive you?

You know he will! He proves that to you by taking away your sins on the cross for you and he announced that truth to be true when he rose from the dead. The people could be at peace because they were made right with their relationship with their God.

On the first Sunday after Easter Thomas finally found peace. He found it in Jesus' resurrection. Because Christ is risen we are right with God and that really gives us peace. But, look again at how he gives us peace. He doesn't give us possessions. He doesn't give us time from our work. He doesn't give us large families and many friends. He gives us these blessings, but he gives us peace in a marvelous way. He takes your sins away by going to a cross and dying a death he didn't need to die so that we could be called children of God. That is why we have peace. Amen!