

## **“Peace Be With You”**

19 April 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

### **Welcome & Call to Worship:**

Good morning folks! You're very welcome to our service this morning. This is the sixth time that we've had an online service. And in these days of the coronavirus, the passage that comes to my mind is Psalm 91, and I just want to read you some verses from Psalm 91.

### **Reading:** Psalm 91

Amen. This is the Word of the LORD. As we begin our service, we're going to sing “Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing”. In the second verse, the writer of the song talks about *raising his ebenezer*. And this comes from I Samuel 7, where God has just delivered the Israelites from the Philistines. And the prophet Samuel lifts up this stone that he calls Ebenezer, and Ebenezer means, “Thus far has the LORD helped us.” And I think, six weeks into our exile from our church building, we can say, “Thus far has the LORD helped us.” So let's join together in praise and come with thankful hearts as we sing, “Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing”.

### **Praise:** Come Thou Fount

### **Prayers of Adoration and Confession:**

Well, let us talk to the One, to Whom we've been singing, our God, that Fount of every blessing. Let's pray.

Dear heavenly Father, we praise You this morning for all the blessings we have in and through the work of our Lord Jesus on the cross. We stand forgiven at the cross. We are recipients of Your great grace and mercy. Nothing separates us from Your love. We are welcomed into Your family and have been given the Holy Spirit. You fill us with Your love, peace and joy, and in this we are eternally secure. You are indeed our fount of every blessing. Our prayer is that You will open our eyes to see You in all Your glory, to receive You into our hearts with renewed conviction, that we will be kept close to You. Forgive us when we use Your created gifts and the pleasures of the world, and forget about You. Forgive us for our rebellious desires, our selfish hearts, that lead us away from You. When we struggle to apply the truth of the gospel, and our minds and hearts are lost to You, we are sorry that we are “prone to wander, God I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.” Father, we pray for a deep renewal of our hearts. Having had so many things we normally do taken away, help us pray with the psalmist, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from Your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me” (Psalm 51:10-12) Thank you, Lord, for Your deep interest and concern in us, and lead us to experience the joy of knowing the resurrected Lord Jesus. We pray in His name, amen.

**Reading:** John 20:19-31

**Sermon:**

I want to say thank you to Rosalinde for reading to us from John 20, and if you have your Bibles, do open it there. I heard someone speaking on television about life BC - not meaning *before Christ*, but meaning *before COVID*! However, more recently, our attention has turned to life AC, the time after COVID, with talk of exit strategies and the new normal. And so for the next three weeks, I want to consider the world of the disciples post the resurrection of Jesus and look at the new normal for them, and see their experience through John's description of their three meetings with Him in chapters 20 and 21.

Our world has changed because of COVID-19, the coronavirus! Our lives have changed, and we are unsure what the future will hold for us. And for the first disciples, their world changed dramatically: Jesus is dead, the Jewish authorities had Him crucified and they are afraid the same will happen to them. That is why we find them locked in because of that fear, and then Jesus came and stood among them and they were overjoyed (vv. 19-20).

I. "Stop doubting and believe."

In this talk I'll not state or debate the proofs of the resurrection of Jesus, though there are many. I simply share with you the Christian belief stated in the Apostles Creed: "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, was crucified, died and buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day, He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven." Therefore, in summary, Christians believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and that fact changes everything! It radically alters the lives of those who believe, and it offers incredible hope when faced with death and fear, whatever its source.

So, here is my first challenge to us all. It's the challenge Jesus put strongly to Thomas: "Stop doubting and believe." Most of us have heard the message of Jesus throughout our lives and, like Thomas, we remain somewhat sceptical, unconvinced, and with honest doubts. Thomas is strongly encouraged, some would say commanded, by Jesus to examine the evidence of the resurrection. "Put your finger here, see my side!" (v. 27) and then believe. Let me be similarly direct: do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead? If you do, confess that belief, worship Him and come on board. Join Thomas in saying, "My Lord and my God." If you do, then we are blessed because of this faith. Thomas saw and believed. We believe, and we see.

Jesus is saying, with the reality of the resurrection, the time for unbelief is over. Believe in the fact of the resurrection and be blessed with eternal life. With this real and deadly threat of the coronavirus around us, the time for fudging, for unbelief, for half-heartedness regarding the fact of Jesus Christ and His resurrection is over. Jesus *has* risen; He has risen indeed! Now, if you do have doubts, then do look at that evidence again, or talk to me or some other Christian.

So what, then, are the blessings and implications of Jesus' resurrection from the dead?

## II. "Peace be with you."

Well firstly, Jesus says to those who believe, "Peace be with you". It is, of course, simply a common Hebrew greeting of the time, *Shalom Alekum*. However, Jesus repeats it three times - you'll see that in verse 19, 21, and 26. And its connection with Him, showing the disciples His hands and side as proof that it was Him and that He was risen from the dead, point to a deeper and highly significant reality for the disciples.

What does that peace really entail? Well, it means relationship peace, no longer in conflict, no longer condemned. It points to the hostility between God and them having disappeared. Their sins are forgiven! Do you remember Psalm 51, those beautiful pictures of forgiveness, that they're healed, washed, that God says, "it's ok", and He ultimately deletes their sin. That peace is brought about through God removing the hostility of the broken relationship between Him and them, paying the price on the cross, so that there may be peace with God (Romans 5:1), and relationship restored. The disciples are assured their sins are forgiven; their guilt is gone. Therefore, the words Jesus says to them - "Peace be with you" - are so much more than a greeting. They are a reality. The disciples have peace with God, and that peace was the peace that He promised earlier and John recorded in Ch. 14:27. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled; do not be afraid."

An interesting line of thought is to consider that Jesus still has the scars on His hands and in His side. They are a reminder that He suffered for us, He understands what suffering is. He is humble and gentle. He knows our weakness and He sympathises with us. That idea is outlined in Hebrews 4:15-16. He carries these scars for eternity and it's a wonderful reality. Being in the presence and the care of such a Person is not stressful but reassuring and peaceful. We stand to applaud those in our health services who, at present, are putting their lives on the line for us, and rightly so - those who have shown such skill and can be trusted. And when we see how much God has done for us on the cross - when we see the scars on His hands, and His feet, and His side - and we can attest His victory in the resurrection, surely we can trust such a God with our lives. And when He says, "Peace be with you", we know He means it and He has the ability to deliver it.

## III. "Receive the Holy Spirit."

But that also, it also means authority to deal with all that is opposed to us. Again, in John's gospel, Chapter 16:33, we read: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart I have overcome the world". Jesus is the victor, as we saw last week in Psalm 118, with complete, sovereign authority. He reigns! The hostility of the Jews may still be present, but this peace is with you through the giving of the Holy Spirit, as we see in verse 22.

To help the disciples understand, Jesus acts out the giving of the Holy Spirit. He *breathes* on them and He gives them that Holy Spirit. Therefore, because of the resurrection, the disciples were given peace with God, because their sins were forgiven. They were given peace in the world, because God had demonstrated His authority over the world. And they had peace in His presence, because He is a gentle and humble God who showed them the extent of His love and continues to identify with their weakness and suffering. This is not insignificant. It is deep and it is real, a real source of peace and joy.

“Peace be with you”. Do you accept the need for the peace Jesus gives? Have you grasped the implication of Jesus' resurrection: the forgiveness of sin is offered, authority over the world is declared, and His gracious presence is assured? If so, that changes how you live! Like all the disciples, we confess, “My Lord and my God.” We receive the Holy Spirit. We obey His call to be sent. We seek first His Kingdom. We rejoice in the wonderful presence of Jesus, church will be our delight and because Jesus rose from the dead, *all* because Jesus rose from the dead, and is alive! The present crisis reminds us of our economic and human vulnerability, our lack of control. But with Jesus we have everything we need, and His death, resurrection and the ongoing presence through the Holy Spirit, enables Him to say to you today, “Peace be with you.” Amen.

**Praise:** Peace, Perfect Peace

**Prayers for Others:**

Heavenly Father, we praise You for Your holiness and Your everlasting love for us. In Christ, we come before You with freedom and carry our asks and our concerns. In the light of the COVID-19, we pray that You have mercy on the world. You are sovereign over everything and nothing happens without Your permission. We pray that You have mercy and deliver us from this pandemic, Lord, if this is Your will. We pray for the people who are sick, not only with COVID-19, but also with other diseases, that You restore their health. We also pray for those who are struggling financially as a consequence of the pandemic, including missionaries that are being impacted in their support. We pray that You provide them support in everything they need, as You have promised, Lord. We pray for the people in the frontline of this battle, especially those who are from our community. We ask You, Lord, for the leaders of each affected country, that You give them wisdom to take the decisions that will benefit the people the most. We pray for the families that are spending more time together now because of the pandemic, that You help them in any difficulties that may arise, and that You actually make them enjoy the privilege of being more time with their loved ones. We pray that You help us to use the extra time that the quarantine is bringing us to spend more of that with You and invest in our relationship with You. We also pray for those who live alone and are emotionally impacted by the quarantine, that You would be their support and company. O Lord, please restore our church's gatherings, and the gatherings of the people all over the world. We are missing that so much. The Church is a project of Yours, and we believe You have joy when Your people meet

together to worship You. While You don't do that Lord, we pray that You give us wisdom to learn how to be church in this situation, how to love others without being physically near them, and how to share Your gospel during these times. In the light of this situation, we pray that Your name would be praised and people will turn back to You. We pray for the leadership of Adelaide Road Presbyterian Church, that You give them wisdom and guidance to lead Your church according to Your will. We pray for all the families that are part of our church. We pray that You keep their faith and pour Your grace over each family even more. We pray that in the name of Jesus, amen.

Pardon for sin, and a peace that endures; His own presence with us always; strength for today and hope for tomorrow. Let us sing of His great faithfulness to us.

**Closing Praise:** IPH 89 Great Is Thy Faithfulness

**Benediction:**

Well, let me say some good words to you in the form of a benediction, and I'm going to read to you from Hebrews 13:20-21.

"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."