

**John 20:19-23** <sup>19</sup> On the evening of that 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!" <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

### **"Peace Be with You"**

In the February *Presbyterian Record* many of you probably read the article by the Moderator of the General Assembly, Rev. Cheol Soon Park entitled "Do You Really Want Peace?: Then Uphold the Cross, not Pride." He made an interesting point about peace. First, he defined peace. He said it literally means when everything stays in its place. Then he noted that the Korean idea of peace is that it is when everyone and everything is perfectly balanced. As the result of this way of thinking of peace we say there can be no peace without justice and fairness. There is not peace until everyone is properly compensated. Secondly, he speaks about how God made peace with us noting that it was totally unfair and terribly unbalanced. He writes: "Peace was not made because God got even with us, but because he gave his only son Jesus Christ. Peace was made, not when we were balanced with God, but when Jesus Christ who was equal to God lowered himself and became one of us. Yes, indeed peace was made when our Lord Jesus sacrificed himself for us all, when he gave everything he had for us. Peace will be made today if we sacrifice, and put others before ourselves."

Moderator Park opened my eyes a bit with his thoughts on peace. I went to a Mennonite university where peace and justice issues were taught as part of the core curriculum even for business majors. I was educated to think like the bumper sticker says, "No Justice – No Peace;" without economic and legal fairness and respect for individual human rights there will be no such thing as peace. This nation has not treated its First Nations people with justice so there is no real peace in the relationship just unfair treaties and poverty. There's no war, but there is no peace either. For there to be real peace, a just peace, some rather huge sacrifices would have to be made on the part of Canada and forgiveness extended from the First Nations. The Peace and Reconciliation Commission is a step in the right direction and it is quite remarkable that our government has begun to utilize the most basic of Jesus' teachings.

Peace and what constitutes it is a very complicated topic. As Moderator Park noted in his editorial, the definition of peace varies from culture to culture. Asking two peoples to live together in peace is hard to do when they both define it differently. Nevertheless, making peace is something that the followers of Jesus Christ are called to do for as we shall see God has given peace and the ability to make it to the followers of Jesus. The Christian faith is not an inward journey to find inner peace. In fact, I know of nowhere in the Bible where peace is spoken of as inner peace. In the Christian faith peace is external and involves relationships between people. I'll say more on that in a moment.

“Peace be with you,” Jesus told his disciples. Forgive me, you are going to get a Greek lesson. That phrase in Greek consists of two words, *eirene humin* which is the noun “peace” and the pronoun “you.” There is no verb “be” or preposition “with.” In Greek, the pronoun is of what is called the dative case which is generally used to indicate the noun to which something is given and also possession. This phrase quite literally means peace is given to you or peace is yours. Unfortunately, since this phrase is the first thing Jesus says to his disciples, we take it as being a simple greeting when in fact he is stating the reality that peace is among them or they are about to be given peace. Peace is among them because he is among them. Moreover, peace is about to be given to them by his gift of the Holy Spirit to them.

So, let’s try to hear this passage differently now. Jesus shows up in a locked room with his disciples and doesn’t say, “Howdy, peace to you.” Rather he says, “Peace is yours.” Then he tells them “Peace is given you,” and adds, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” They now are to carry out his ministry of reconciliation; of announcing that Jesus has made peace between us and God by his death as well as embody this peace in their common life. Then Jesus breathed on them and said probably the most troubling thing he ever said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any they are retained.” Apparently, there is a correlation between the presence of peace among people and forgiving sins. One does not have peace unless one forgives.

Perhaps we should ask what peace is. As we see here in this passage, peace is the presence of Jesus among people and the presence of the Holy Spirit in people. “No God – No Peace” would be the bumper sticker. Peace also involves forgiving sins; “No Forgiveness – No Peace”. Forgiveness which actually means letting go was what Jesus’ death was all about. As John says in 1 John 2:1-2, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” Jesus death was all about removing the shameful stain of sin from humanity. Confessing and forgiving is the way we keep things clean. So, firstly, peace involves God’s presence being with and in people and sin being dealt with by means of forgiveness.

The biblical understanding of peace, as I mentioned earlier, involves relations between people rather than simple inner peace. Acts 4:32-35 gives us a good picture of what the biblical idea of peace is: “Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.” Peace involves equitable and fair living conditions where there is no poverty nor extreme wealth.

So, what does this look like in real life? Let's talk about parenting for a moment. Dana and I had William baptized and we promised to raise him as a Christian for he now belongs to Jesus Christ by no decision of his own. We did not promise to do the best we can in the hopes that when he grows up he decides to be a Christian. He is now a Christian because we, the church, claimed God's grace upon him by baptizing him. Therefore, Dana and I must raise him as a Christian. This means we will have to teach William that Jesus Christ is with him and the Holy Spirit is in him making him to be like Jesus. Therefore, church, prayer, and Bible study are more necessary than homework. Instead of just trying to teach him the difference between right and wrong, we will have to teach him what sin is and that God has forgiven him. We will have to teach him to forgive when he has been treated unfairly. It's hard enough to teach children not to fight or call people names or hold a grudge. But, actually teaching him to forgive takes the ballgame to a-whole-nother stadium. We will also have to teach him that everything he has is on loan to him from God and therefore when he has too much he should give the excess to others. This task of teaching gets even more complicated when I realize that I actually have to walk the walk in front of him.

How about our relationships with other adults? As I said earlier we, the followers of Jesus are those whom God has entrusted with peace and enabled to create it. All that stuff I just said Dana and I will have to teach William and also live it in front of him is how we all really should live our lives. When we are treated unfairly, we forgive. If we have treated another unfairly, we confess and apologize. When the person in the cubicle next to us is treated unfairly, not only do we encourage them to forgive but we should also attempt to mediate. Moreover, if we have too much, it creates peace to simplify. We are to help the needy especially those among us. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God." Make peace and people will know that we are born of God. Amen.