

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 18 April 2021

God of life, your Spirit raised Jesus from dead. Your Spirit inspired the prophets and writers of Scripture. Your Spirit draws us to Christ and helps us to acknowledge him as Lord. We ask that you will send your Spirit now to give us deeper insight, encouragement, faith, and hope through the proclamation of the Easter gospel. Amen.

1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

The Peace of Christ

“Peace be with you” were the words that the risen Jesus said to his troubled disciples. The disciples had reasons to be troubled. They had lost their beloved teacher. Their dreams and hope for building up God’s kingdom had gone too. They were hiding from the Jews as they feared for their lives. Worse still, the report about the risen Jesus was from women whose accounts had little value to be counted. Despite all these things, peace was what Jesus gave them. Peace of Christ allowed them to see things from totally new perspectives. Then they couldn’t remain the same any longer, but they began to live as the peace of Christ.

The risen Jesus came as peace in person when he was raised from the dead. In this peace, death or sufferings were no more. In 1 John 3:2b, it reads that when we can see the peace of Christ, we also become the peace. But what is this peace really? Peace – *shalom* in Hebrew is not the absence of conflict or war — but it is “to be safe in mind, body, or estate.” It speaks of completeness, fullness, or a type of wholeness that encourages us to give back the same peace to others. True biblical *shalom* thus refers to an inward sense of completeness or wholeness. Although it can also mean the absence of war, most biblical references refer to inner completeness and tranquillity. In Israel today, when you greet someone or say goodbye, you say, *Shalom*. You are literally saying, “may you be full of well-being” or, “may health and prosperity be upon you.” If this is how we understand biblical peace, then many verses take on a whole new meaning. With this in mind, we’ll see a few passages in scripture about peace.

In Numbers 6:23-26, it reads, “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.’” The context of this blessing is ironic. God told Aaron to bless Israel

with peace while they were getting ready to go conquer the Promised Land. If peace means “the absence of war,” then this doesn’t make sense, since they would soon be destroying cities. Here God was referring to inner peace and completeness brought on by sharing in God’s countenance and God’s protection. That was the blessing that Israel needed. Israel was to experience times of outward peace rarely, but even in the midst of battle, they were to have an inward rest brought on by the presence of the Lord, regardless of the outward circumstances. So it should be for us as well. Take another.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.”¹ It is one of the sayings in the Beatitudes. In this verse, Jesus is not referring to mediators or political negotiators but to those who carry an inward sense of the fullness and safety that is only available through heirship with God. In the biblical understanding of shalom, there is a point at which we have so much shalom that it spills out from us, and is repaid or rendered to others. And so, as we make others peaceful and inwardly complete, that makes us a peacemaker. Jesus said these peacemakers will be called children of God. By sharing God’s uncontainable peace with others, we live a Christ-like life. It also helps us understand the scriptures in depth.

When Jesus was granting the disciples peace, his body still bore the scars that remind us of the Passion, the crucifixion and all. The identification between Jesus and the risen Christ is crucial for the disciples and us to understand scriptures. If we only care for the glorious resurrection and the Christ as the victor, we may miss the purpose of the Passion and the cross. In this case, we may still not understand the meaning of the peace of Christ. Christianity is not only about spirituality. It involves sufferings, failures, and human life as a whole. Without a cross, without any engagement of life issues in this world, the devotion to a living, spiritual Christ will lose its power. His pierced body bears witness against a mode of discipleship that does not endure scars on behalf of others. Recognizing the scars and understanding Jesus’ life and ministry in the scriptures let us live like Christ Jesus here and now.

Before the crucifixion and the resurrection, the disciples could not comprehend Jesus’ teachings as such. Now the risen Jesus opened their hearts and minds to see it. When the Holy Spirit came to us, it is the Spirit who has been helping us read and understand scriptures. Jesus said that the entire scripture was written about him and his saving work.² Simply put, whenever

¹ Matthew 5:9

² Luke 24:44b

we contemplate the scriptures, we are able to find the meaning of the cross, Jesus as the word or the wisdom of God, and the grace of God. By simply living by this peace, we are fulfilling the scripture. It enables us to speak out against any abuses for this peace. In this way, we bring repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations.³ Proclamation of the peace of Christ doesn't depend on something grand plan or work, but simply to live a life as a living proof of the peace.

In our story time, we watched a short video clip, *Malala*, based on a book titled *I am Malala*. The second question was, 'what made Malala voice her opinions on equal education?' The answers varied. Her upbringing and her passion for learning, and her wishes to share the joy of learning with others may have enabled her to become such a powerful voice. Her inner strength and simplicity as a teenager speak of the presence of the peace of God in her. The peace may also have helped her to be courageous enough to speak it out that even adults may not dare to do. In *I am Malala*, she said, "We realize the importance of our voices only when we are silenced,...One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world..." 'When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful.'⁴ Her words and actions have influenced many people, and she became the youngest Nobel peace prize laureate in 2014. Malala's work, together with other human right activists' works, began to identify the sufferings of people that are against the love of God. Whether they acknowledge it or not, the call to work for the love of God is from the eternal. This belief and faith in the love of God have enabled them to be in the peace of God no matter what circumstances that they are in.

Likewise, the good news of Jesus Christ began by identifying humans' total deprivation of access to God. Through Christ, the cross became the place of reconciliation between God's children and Godself. It is about the life here and now and the life to come in the eternal. Since Easter, the task became ours as we live in the peace under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As seen in *Malala*, the good news of Jesus Christ follows a centrifugal trajectory. It is universal in its scope and particular in its action. The peace of God in Christ transcends all the barriers set up by human greed and prejudices. It is good news for everyone without exception. Peace - the fullness of complete tranquillity in us through Christ, in turn, lets us share the same peace with our neighbours, with the wider community and the world. In this way, the peace of Christ and

³ Luke 24:47

⁴ Malala Yousafzai, *I am Malala*, 1-30 of 401

missional faith life go together. May peace be with and in us so that we will continually live as the peace of Christ in the community and beyond. Amen.