

John 20:19-31

The Risen Christ says, "Peace be with you"

Tim Anderson 17/4/22

I want you to imagine for a minute that you died
And by some miracle you rose up from the dead,
Stepped out of the morgue,
Oh it's chilly in there,
Someone should turn down the air conditioning,
And you walked into a room full of your friends.
What's the first thing that you would say to them?
"Hey guys, look it's me, I'm alive!"

Or,

"Surprise, I bet you never thought you'd see me again!"

Or,

"Joe, what are you looking so happy for?

You should have been mourning,

I was dead."

Or,

"Fred, stop chatting up my wife,

She's spoken for, OK!"

I'm guessing one thing you wouldn't have run around saying is,
"Peace be with you!"

But that's the first thing that Jesus says to his disciples.

In verse 19, they're the first words that come out of his mouth,

"Peace be with you!"

Then in verse 21 when they've got over their initial shock,

"Peace be with you!"

A week later in verse 26,

Jesus appears among them again and the first thing he says is,

"Peace be with you!"

Why is that?

Why does Jesus greet his friends by saying

"Peace be with you?"

Is it because he was a good Anglican?
 Anglicans are always stopping in the middle of our church services
 and saying,

“Peace be with you!” To each other.

No. I don’t think Jesus was an Anglican.

Is it because he was a very spiritual person
 and always greeted people like that?

No. There is no evidence in the Bible
 that Jesus ever said “Peace be with you!”

Until he had died and risen again.

Was it because the disciples were really scared when they saw him,
 And so Jesus said, “Peace be with you!” to calm them down.

No. The disciples were scared before they saw Jesus.

They were scared of the Jews.

They thought that seeing as how the Jews had executed their leader,
 They might be next!

But it says in verse 20 that when they saw Jesus,

They were overjoyed.

They were overjoyed and then Jesus said, "Peace be with you!"

So why did Jesus say, “Peace be with you!”?

Let me read you something Jesus said to his disciples
 earlier in John’s gospel,

This is from chapter 14 starting at verse 25,

It’s Jesus just before his death,

telling his disciples about how he’s going back to the Father.

“All this I have spoken while still with you.

But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit,

Whom the Father will send in my name,

Will teach you all things

And will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Peace I leave with you;

My peace I give to you.”

So why did Jesus say, “Peace be with you!”?

Because as part of Jesus returning to the Father,

He left two things behind for his friends.
Number one - The Holy Spirit, who would live in us
And number two - his peace.
“Peace I leave with you;
My peace I give you.”
So when Jesus says,
“Peace be with you!” to the disciples after the resurrection,
What he’s really saying is,
“Here’s the peace that I promised that I would leave with you
Back when I was talking with you at the last supper.
I’ve done my job on earth now.
I’m getting ready to go back to the Father.
But here are the two things that I promised.
“Peace be with you!”
And then he breathed on them and said,
“Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Now you might ask,
Why did Jesus have to wait until after his death and resurrection
to give his disciples his peace?
Why couldn’t he give them peace from the start?
The reason is because it’s Jesus death on the cross
That made peace with God possible.
Human beings were at war with God.
God made us and he wanted us to live as his people.
But we decided to ignore God and do things our own way.
And we declared a state of war against our God.
Like a little kid shaking his fist at a loving parent.
Well our rebellion against God was so offensive to God,
That a penalty had to be paid.
Christians call that rebellion against God sin.
Sin means ignoring God and choosing to live life your own way.
God says that the wages of sin is death.
Someone had to die because of our sin.
It was either going to be us or Jesus:

God's own Son

God the Son.

So when Jesus died on the cross,

He made peace with God possible.

If we become Jesus' followers,

If we put our trust in him and live as his disciples,

Then instead of being at war with God,

We can be at peace with God.

So after Jesus died and rose again,

Peace with God was possible!

It hadn't been possible before hand.

And Jesus was giving that peace to his followers who trusted in him.

"Peace be with you!"

Easter Sunday means that we can receive God's peace.

And that's not all.

He didn't just give them peace.

He gave them a job to do!

Easter Sunday means you have a job.

20:23 "As the Father has sent me,

I am sending you.

If you forgive anyone his sin,

They are forgiven:

If you do not forgive them,

They are not forgiven."

Have you ever wondered

"Why is it that God doesn't remove all the evil from the world now?"

I know he's going to do it in the future.

But Jesus by his death and resurrection

has already won the victory over sin and death,

so why doesn't God get rid of all the evil now?"

It is true.

The battle is already won.

There's only one reason God delays.

It's because he's got a job for the church to do.

“As the Father has sent me,
I am sending you.”

Have you ever thought about that?

The only reason this earth is still here

is because Jesus has given the church a job to do.

It makes the mission of the church tremendously important.

If you said to someone on the street,

That the only reason this earth is still here,

Is because the church hasn't finished doing the job

that Jesus has given us,

They'd probably think you were a bit crackers.

But that's the truth.

It's not because we're super important.

It's because the job Jesus has given us is crucial to God's plans.

It's the only reason God delays in bringing this earth to its final end,

And making everything new.

If the job we've got is so important.

What is it?

Well we get two descriptions.

One in verse 23,

And one connected to the story of Jesus' appearing to Thomas.

So first of all,

Verse 23.

“If you forgive anyone his sins,

They are forgiven.

If you do not forgive them,

They are not forgiven.”

“As the Father sent me,

So I send you.”

To do what Jesus?

To forgive people's sins

And even more scarily perhaps,

to not forgive people's sins.
That's our job!

Now that's controversial, isn't it?

For many of us

even saying somebody else has sins seems incredibly judgemental.

To say that it's our job to forgive them or not forgive them,

That seems presumptuous to the point of blasphemy.

Surely it's God's job to forgive sins?

But this is what Jesus says.

"If you forgive anyone his sins,

They are forgiven.

If you do not forgive them,

They are not forgiven."

It is God's job to forgive sins.

But that's implied in what Jesus says.

"If you forgive anyone his sins,

They are forgiven."

They are forgiven by whom?

By God, of course.

"If you do not forgive them,

They are not forgiven."

Not forgiven by whom?

By God, of course.

God is still forgiving and not forgiving.

But we have a large part to play in the process.

Well how will this work in practice?

It's not about setting up confessionals in churches

for ministers to hear confession.

It's not about the minister pronouncing an absolution

during a church service.

And there's a reason for that.

This verse is not directed to clergy.

It's directed to all Christian people.
Jesus is talking to all his disciples,
Not just the twelve.
Forgiving sins and not forgiving sins.
It's a job for all of us,
Not just the ministers.

So how does it work in practice?

This is how I think it works.

Suppose you share the gospel message with a friend.

You tell them about Jesus' death on the cross for the sins of the world –

You tell them about Jesus' resurrection to obtain the gift of eternal life.

You take them along to be part of the church community.

And they say to you,

“I want to become a follower of Jesus.”

Well your response would be,

“Follow Jesus and your sins will be forgiven.”

And when you say that,

God has forgiven their sins.

He's worked through you.

Your explanation of the gospel message –

Your bearing witness to Jesus –

Your inviting them to become part of the Christian community.

He's worked through all of that,

And through you –

God has forgiven their sins.

But supposing you do all that,

You explain the cross and the resurrection,

You take them along to a Christianity Explored course

that your church is running,

So they can have their questions answered.

You put in lots of effort –

So that they might have the opportunity to receive eternal life.

And they say to you,

“I don’t want to follow Jesus.”
 You’d have to say to them,
 “Friend, your sins are not forgiven.”
 When you do that,
 It’s both a description of the reality of their situation,
 And sadly it’s a condemnation of their rebellion against God.
 God has not forgiven that person’s sins.

“If you forgive anyone their sins,
 They are forgiven;
 If you do not forgive them,
 They are not forgiven.”
 It gives our lives as part of God’s church great significance,
 Doesn’t it?

“If you (that’s you lot out there) forgive anyone their sins,
 They are forgiven;
 If you (that’s you lot out there again) do not forgive them,
 They are not forgiven.”

I said there were two descriptions of the job Jesus has given us.
 That’s the first forgiving sins and withholding forgiveness.
 And the second is in John’s description of Thomas coming to faith.
 Thomas’ story is all about believing in Jesus.
 The first thing that Thomas says,
 “Unless I see the nail marks etc,
 I will not believe it.”
 Then Jesus’ statement to Thomas,
 “Stop doubting and believe.”
 And if you read the original Greek the emphasis is even more apparent.
 It says,
 “Stop unbelieving and believe.”
 It’s clumsy in English but it shows what John is stressing.
 Then Jesus’ next statement to Thomas,
 “Because you have seen me,

You have believed;
Blessed are those who have not seen
And yet have believed.”
Then John’s editorial comment which follows,
“These stories have been written down,
That you, the reader, may believe that Jesus is the Christ,
The Son of God,
And that by believing you may have life in his name.”

It’s a story about believing.
Jesus helps Thomas to believe.
Jesus says that other people who believe are blessed.
John says that the goal of his writings is to help people believe in Jesus.
How does that fit in with Jesus’ job that he has left the church?
Well our job is to help people believe in Jesus.
The Father sent Jesus,
And Jesus helped people to believe in all sorts of ways,
But in particular Jesus helped Thomas to believe.
And Jesus sends the disciples,
And so in response to that call,
John has written his gospel,
To help people believe.

That leaves an unmistakable question begging for us.
Jesus sends us too.
What are we going to do to fulfil our job description?
If you forgive anyone’s sins they are forgiven;
If you do not forgive them they are not forgiven.
What are we going to do to help people believe,
So that their sins may be forgiven?
If we’re not doing this,
Then we’re like a vineyard that’s not growing grapes.
Or to use the biblical analogy,
We’re like a fig tree with no figs.
And I don’t need to tell you what happens to the fig tree

When that situation persists.
 So what are we going to do?
 Our vision is to help people know Jesus and his purpose for their lives.
 We need to be in the business of making disciples.
 We do that in our regular ministries.
 Whether we are at youth group or running a service in a nursing home
 our aim is to help people believe in Jesus and follow him.
 But we also need to have times where we make a special effort.
 It's a number of years since we last ran a Christianity Explored course.
 I think it's time we did that again.
 Not on a small scale in someone's family room.
 On a slightly larger scale.
 In the church hall with a meal.
 What would it take for us to do that?
 It would take one of the home groups
 deciding to make that their project for a term.
 For the most part,
 People are too busy to commit another night.
 But a group who have already committed a certain night of the week
 could decide to devote a term of that to an outreach.
 I wonder which home group it will be who will get in first?
 Which home group wants to see doubting Thomases become believers?
 Which home group wants Jesus' peace to be with the lost?
 Who will it be?

Easter Sunday is the day that you got given a job.
 Jesus leaves his followers with his peace and the Holy Spirit,
 And Jesus leaves us with a job to do.
 That job is to forgive people's sins
 Or not to forgive them,
 Which ever is appropriate.
 Another way of describing that same job,
 Is to encourage people to believe in Jesus.
 Here's something to think about.
 How can we best do the job Jesus has given us?