

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

Pentecost Sunday – 28th May 2023

John 20:19-23

IN PEACE

Do you ever feel like you could do with more peace in your life? While some of you are probably saying ‘yes, absolutely!’ to that, others are probably asking, ‘what do you mean by that?’. And that’s a fair question, because the way each one of us defines peace, and therefore the peace we seek, can be different, in fact, for ourselves alone we can have many ways of describing it. The desire for peace could be, quite simply, wanting quiet, stillness, less busyness, in our lives. It could be wanting to be free from guilt which we feel is always weighing us down. Maybe it’s an acceptance or reconciliation of the past and being able to move forward. The restoration of broken relationships. A feeling of safety and security; physically, financially, socially, emotionally. Is it being happy and satisfied with where you and your loved ones both are now and where you’re headed? Or, is what comes into your head when I ask if you could do with more peace in your life something different? There are many ways to look at what having peace means in our lives, so it is likely that we will have at least some part or aspect of our life in which we feel like we could do with more peace.

Is experiencing peace, at least some of the time, knowing that there is always someone there with you, watching over you, someone you can hand everything over to and who you can trust to be with you in everything?

A popular story is that the North American Cherokee nation had a practice as part of their manhood initiation in which they took their young men, blindfolded, into a forest. They then placed them in one spot and left them alone there for the night. The test of bravery was that they could not move from that spot or take off their blindfold, no matter what they heard, or smelt, or even felt touching them. When they heard the sound of birds heralding the new dawn, they were then allowed to remove their blindfold. Each young man on hearing the dawn birdcall and removing his blindfold, as he looked around him saw a man standing a short distance away, holding a bow and arrow. His first thought may have been one of fear that one of his tribe’s enemies had found him alone and by

himself. But then, as the dawn continued to get lighter, he saw the man was in fact his father, who had been quietly standing guard all through the night, making sure no harm came to his son as his courage was tested. Imagine the relief, the peace, the young men must have felt when they realised the one who loved them had been with them through all they faced.

Think about how the disciples would've felt when Jesus came to them on that first Easter Sunday night. Imagine the relief, the peace, they must have felt when they realised the one who loved them was still with them through all they faced. Even though Jesus had told them several times that He would be arrested, tried, killed, but then raised from the dead, after what the disciples had seen happen to Him, and then being told His body was gone, they were scared and felt abandoned and alone. And now He comes to them, and gives them that common Jewish greeting, 'Shalom', 'Peace'. But the peace they would have felt at this time would have been like nothing they had ever felt before! Jesus is truly alive, and He is with them. Perhaps even looking back later they realised they didn't really know what peace was until then. Jesus is alive, He is with them, and in being given the Holy Spirit they know God will always be with them.

In this account we have Jesus giving the disciples the Holy Spirit in a small, quiet, way. The other more dramatic account we have of the Holy Spirit coming is in Acts 2, the well-known story of the flames and the wind, and the people speaking different languages. The fact we have these two different stories reminds us that the Holy Spirit does come at different times in different ways. And in a way, the dramatic Acts 2 story of the Holy Spirit's coming gives us the 'how' of the Pentecost event, while the quieter and simpler one we have here in John's Gospel gives us the 'why'. And the 'why' is to; give us peace, and send us out in peace. One of Jesus' promises to the disciples was that He would not leave them alone, but that when He did go He would give them the One, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who would be with them always. And already now they are both receiving the Holy Spirit, and the peace which cannot be found anywhere else, and being sent out in that Spirit to share that peace.

The peace of knowing God is with us in our lives, in all we go through, whatever we face. Knowing He will help us with whatever we want to give Him, that He will take our hurts, our anger,

our guilt, our fears, our worries, our frustrations. Knowing that in the Holy Spirit we know God is really with us always. Our baptism gave us the first seal of that. In that simple ceremony, by ordinary water joined with God's Word, the Holy Spirit came to us, and God said, 'I love you, you are mine, I will never leave you'. Every time we come to Holy Communion and with the bread and wine we touch and taste God's love for us in the body and blood of Jesus, the Spirit of God says to us, 'I love you, give it all to me, know my peace, know you are forgiven, know I am always with you'. And in God's Word, as we read it, hear it, think about it, live it, in that Word again God by the power of the Holy Spirit is telling us of His love, of His care, and inviting us to know His peace.

Peace, it's something that as people we all look for, we seek, but do we always look in the right places? What are some places that not just others, but we ourselves, might look for peace but which are not always good for us? The list includes those things which are not bad or wrong themselves, but in which we seek something we won't find, full and true peace. We might try to find peace in getting more and more money for ourselves, believing that there is an amount which will give us peace. We might think we will find peace when we just do what we want, enjoy ourselves, always put ourselves first, and that having the freedom to do that will give us peace. Or it could be that in a relationship we expect someone else to give us that peace. Or that attaining a desired goal, or possession, will help us to know peace. In and of themselves there is nothing wrong with these things, but we know ourselves, and we see around us, that ultimately the peace we and others are seeking cannot be found anywhere but in knowing and relying on God's love for us.

And that's why, as well as giving the disciples the Holy Spirit and God's peace for themselves, Jesus now sends them, and us, out to share that peace. The peace of knowing God's love and forgiveness, and His presence with us always in our lives, is something God wants everyone to know. As we receive it, we are also called to share it. And that comes in how we live our lives, in showing others where we find our peace. Maybe it's in sharing stories with your family, your friends, colleagues, about how God's love helps you get through when things are tough, or that experiencing God's forgiveness in your life helps you to be able to forgive others, even smile at them, even if they aren't forgiving or moving on. Most people we come across each day don't want us to preach our

faith at them, I have no doubt that puts people off as much as anything. But how we live out, how we speak out, that faith is something the Holy Spirit can and does work through. And remember, it isn't all done just through us; we might just be a part of a journey to faith they are on, a journey we might not see get to the point where they experience a full faith. As we know God's peace, the peace of His presence always with us, that's a peace we can share as a part of who we are. Knowing and living that peace enables the Holy Spirit to work through us in helping others to know it too.

Through the faith we have by the power of the Holy Spirit we can live in peace; knowing God's love is always with us, knowing His forgiveness for us, knowing we can look to Him for the hope, the meaning, the peace we all seek in our lives. As we live in peace, we are also sent out in peace, so the Spirit can continue to work in our lives and our witness to enable others to know this peace of faith also. Shalom, God's peace, be with you; God's Spirit continue to help you live in His peace in your life, and to work through you so that others can come to know the peace which can only be found in Him also. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- What does it mean to you to have 'peace' in your life, how do you define it?
- Think about how the young Cherokee men would have felt in discovering their fathers had been watching over them through the night, and how the disciples would have felt when Jesus showed them He was alive. Have you ever had that overwhelming feeling of peace when something you had been worried about turned out to be ok?
- How does having God's peace in your life feel for you? What difference does it make in your life? Are there any situations/parts of your life in which it is especially meaningful, helpful, or comforting?
- Sharing our faith with others is something we often hear that we are called to do, but we can find it intimidating or daunting. In a natural way, without preaching at people or putting them off, how can you share your faith and what it means to you with those in your life? Are there situations in your life in which you are doing this right now, perhaps without even thinking about it?

Pray: thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit, and for the peace we have in our lives by the Spirit coming to us. Ask God to help us to hold on to this faith at those times we find it difficult to do so, and to help us to see how we can share the faith and peace we have with others.

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