

1st Sunday After Easter

Epistle: 1 John 5:4-12

⁴ For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

⁵ Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

⁶ This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ, not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness because the Spirit is truth.

⁷ For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

⁸ And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

⁹ If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

¹⁰ He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

¹¹ And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

¹² He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

Gospel: St. John 20: 19-23

¹⁹ Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

²⁰ And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

²³ Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

Introduction

When my daughter Aly was fifteen, she came to me one night and asked me if I would take her to church. She said several of her friends had invited her but she wanted to go with me so she could ask questions and not feel awkward. I had not attended church in a long time, mostly due to my work schedule and an imbalance between the real world and working in law enforcement. When she asked me to take her to church, something inside me came alive. For many years I had felt that longing, that incessant internal voice, telling me that I needed to make God a priority in my life. I felt that this was the time, and I was excited to start this adventure with her. I remember talking with a friend who was active in his church and his advice was to let my daughter guide the process. Having grown up in the Anglican and Episcopal church, I knew what style of worship I was comfortable with, but perhaps I could be open to something new. We decided to go to several churches and see what we could discover. Our journey took us to many different places of worship around the Rogue Valley, all with different comfort levels. No matter where we went, the conversation in the car was always wonderful and insightful.

One Sunday, I discovered the St. Andrew's website, by accident as I was searching for another church. I had no idea there was an Anglican church here. We drove out to Jacksonville and walked inside, sitting as I normally did in the front pew. The organ music was a pleasant change, and I could tell Aly, who was an orchestra student and viola player, loved it. The liturgy was familiar to me, and everyone was friendly but not overzealous. We had been to some churches where I immediately felt descended upon and uncomfortable with efforts to get us involved. I remember Aly liking the sermon, and it provided a conversation piece that allowed me to further explain the Gospel and other items she was curious about. In the next few weeks, we went to a couple of other churches, but for me I knew where I wanted to be. I just was not

sure with what she was comfortable with. One Sunday, I suggested we return to St. Andrew's for another service. She agreed and we had another positive visit. After our second visit, I knew for certain where I wanted to start attending. I felt it so strongly, deep inside me. On the ride home, I asked her if there was a church she wanted to revisit or if she had any thoughts on where she wanted to focus on and become regular attendees.

Her answer to my question filled my heart with joy as it was remarkably similar to what I experienced. She said, "Dad, I think I want to start going to the church out in Jacksonville. I love the old music and when I was sitting in the pew I felt very much at peace, for the first time in a while." I knew my daughter was going through the normal trials and tribulations of being a teenage girl, but she was also dealing with alopecia. She had lost all of her hair at the age of five and it never grew back. Auto-immune diseases can be very cruel and although she was in excellent health she still struggled to fit in and be accepted. I too was feeling the angst of working in law enforcement, the stress of life, and trying to find a balance between the terrible things I witnessed and the good I knew was in the world. In getting involved in the church and opening our hearts to God we both found a new peace in our lives. Peace that comes with knowing the risen Christ and having the blessed assurance that through His sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, our Lord has provided the way to be reconciled to God. He is with us. Our redeemer lives. We can trust Him with our struggles. As Fr. Chris reminds us at the end of every Communion service from Philippians 4:7:

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

It is this profound sense of peace that is beyond human comprehension, a peace that God provides to those who are in Christ that I believe we felt. This peace is not simply the absence of

conflict or turmoil, but a deep inner calm and tranquility that surpasses what people can understand. It is this peace that Jesus offered to his disciples in our Gospel reading for today.

Body

(John 20:19-23 Jesus appears in the upper room where the fearful and anxious disciples are gathered, fearing the Jewish authorities. He assures them of his peace, shows them his wounds as proof of his resurrection, and then breathes on them, gifting them the Holy Spirit. He then commissions them to continue his work, with the power of the Holy Spirit.)

Our Gospel reading from John 20, opens with Jesus appearing to his disciples in a locked room, where the fearful and anxious disciples are gathered, fearing the Jewish authorities. They were terrified at seeing Him, and thinking he was a ghost. Knowing their fear He states, "Peace be unto you" (v. 19). This is a crucial moment, as it signifies His presence and offers comfort and assurance to them after their fear and doubt. It signifies that our Lord has risen from the dead and now stands before them, just as He had foretold. It is a specific kind of peace, rooted in faith and God's grace, which is so profound and transformative it transcends human comprehension. Jesus shows them His wounds (hands and side), providing tangible evidence that He is indeed the resurrected Christ. This proof is crucial for their faith and understanding that He is indeed risen from the dead.

Jesus tells them this not once but twice, with the second statement containing a call to action. *"Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you"* (v.21). A daunting task considering the events that had just happened, but Jesus gives them an ally in their quest. In verse 22, it states, *"And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost"* This act symbolizes the bestowal of divine power and guidance to them. Jesus then commissions the disciples, as they must now continue His work and *"Go*

therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Finally, Jesus gives them the authority as the first priests of His Church to declare the forgiveness of the sins to those who are penitent. In verse 23, he states, *“Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”*. Offering them a new life with God and repeating the transformational promises of a Risen Christ. All of us here today can be reassured of the same promise. Last week we proclaimed, “He is Risen, The Lord is Risen Indeed!” and now we move on with the knowledge of His resurrection. Many of us, like the disciples huddled in that room, live with fear and anxiety. Keep in mind that the disciples were men who all had fled in fear for their own lives when Jesus was arrested. Peter had denied the Lord three times. They all had doubted the initial reports of Jesus’ resurrection (Luke 24:11). We too have done things we ought not to have done and often in fear we have not lived our life in ways that glorify God. It would certainly be understandable if Jesus had greeted them with scorn and rebuke at their behavior, but the Lord graciously extended and then underscored His peace to them.

We too can experience the Peace of God amidst our fears and worries. We can remember how Christ showed the disciples His wounds and we can remember his pain and suffering on the Cross. These wounds are not just to remind us of His suffering but also His triumph over death and His offer of eternal life with Him. We can share in the peace that is offered, a peace that comes from knowing the Risen Lord is with us.

Action

Peace with God is foundational in your mission for Him. You cannot begin to serve the Lord unless you first are reconciled to Him through the peace that Christ won on the cross. We must be cognizant that our sins alienate us from God.

Paul tells us in his Epistle to the Romans, *“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So, then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his (Rom. 8:7-9).*

However, when you trust in Christ, you enter into a new relationship of peace with God. Again, from Romans, *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).*

As we reflect on last Sunday and our lives moving forward, we can be assured that our Risen Savior has given us great peace. Our Risen Savior has given us great proof of His resurrection. That historical fact should be at the center of our witness for Christ. While it is true that Christ can help people with their personal problems and struggles, that is not the message of the gospel. The gospel is that Christ died for our sins and was raised again according to the Scriptures. While Jesus can and will help us to endure life, that is not the basis for our belief and faith. Believe in Jesus because you are a sinner, and understand He is the only Savior we have. He is risen from the dead and is coming again to judge the living and the dead. We can proclaim the gospel with confidence because we have great proof of His resurrection.

Finally, as with the disciples, our Risen Lord has given us great purpose. Jesus came to establish the Father’s kingdom by bringing people to obedience and to do His will. By sending us in the same way that He was sent, His purpose becomes our marching orders. We should live in obedience to Christ and teach, or help, others to do the same. We should remember the commandments of God and walk henceforth in His Holy ways. We should remember how Jesus taught us to live and pray, forgiving others so that we too may be forgiven of our sins. Above all,

on this First Sunday after Easter, we should remember His sacrifice on the Cross for our redemption and be thankful, not just in our words, but by how we live our lives.

Conclusion

Our reading from John is a short but powerful passage. We see Jesus's presence despite the fear and worry of the disciples. Jesus gives the gift of peace and presents the mission of forgiveness empowered by the Holy Spirit.

So, with renewed strength, understanding, and joy in the Resurrection of our Lord, and in His great mission for us, let us resolve to continue without failing to do His work here on earth each and every day. As we continue, please hold fast in faith and pray that the Peace of God which passeth all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:25).