

John 20:19-31

"The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace."
(Psalm 29:11)

'Peace' – that word that we utter so often as Christians, along with people of many other faiths, and of none.... in many countries and in many languages.

In our gospel reading today, three times we hear Jesus utter the words 'Peace be with you'.

We know that peace is extremely valuable and essential for the happy co-existence of individuals, families, and societies.

Peace Movements

There have been numerous peace movements over the centuries - groups seeking to end war and violence.

There are diverse ideals of peace:

- There are the "anti-war" movements with short-term goals, such as those protesting against the U.S. invasion of Iraq in early 2003.
- Other advocates of pacifism, attempting to build up trust relationships with other countries
- those who believe that humans should not wage war on each other or engage in violent ethnic cleansings over language, race or natural resources or ethical conflict over religion or ideology.
- Those who oppose the proliferation of dangerous technologies and weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear weapons and biological warfare.
- Global peace movements seeking to uphold basic human rights, such as the right of *all* people to have access to air, water, food, shelter and health care.

Over time there has been a long history of those seeking peace.

In the 1600s, **the Quakers** were prominent advocates of peace, with their pacifist interpretation of Christianity.

If we recall beautiful and moving words of the hymn, '*Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*' – these are taken from a longer poem, written by an American Quaker poet, John Greenleaf Whittier.

(The Brewing)

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of Thy peace.

In the early 1900s **Gandhi**, was imprisoned *many times* for his non-violent protests struggle in his to obtain basic human rights for others.

Ghandi was heavily influenced by the pacifist ideas of Russian novelist Leo **Tolstoy**, who said in his book, *A Letter to a Hindu (1908)*, that only by using love as a weapon through passive resistance could the Indian people overthrow colonial rule.

During the First and Second World Wars, peace groups were still active and since then the peace movement has become widespread throughout the world, and its doctrines, once considered radical, are now a part of mainstream political discourse.

When CND, the campaign for nuclear disarmament was launched in 1958, it had the support of religious leaders as well as a wide range of others; academics, journalists and writers.

In the 1960s, the peace movement in the United States opposed their involvement in the Vietnam War.

I could go on There seems to be an overwhelming desire for peace among so many, and yet when we look at the world today, we see anything but peace. If only world leaders could work harder towards this goal.

From the Christian perspective

As Christians, we *exchange* the peace, as we will later in this service; we *sing* about peace on earth (especially at Christmas time), but does religion actually lead us there? It seems that religion more regularly leads to division and marginalization.

We know that our Creator God desires peace for us on earth, to be in right relationship with each other.

What does the Bible say about peace?

There are 429 references to peace in the King James Version of the Bible; different types of peace, including false peace, inner peace, peace with God and peace with man.

Peace is also portrayed as tranquillity, harmony, or security. Depending on the situation, it could mean prosperity or well-being. It can refer to a covenant or a promise kept.

I believe peace for Christians is not about the absence of troubles, but it is peace that is a steadfast, unwavering sense that God gives us even in the midst of troubles.

Being in a relationship with God enables us, when we are worried about things, anxious or disturbed, to leave our burdens with Him through prayer; to entrust our needs and problems to God –to free ourselves from misery and guilt; forgiveness of oneself; the possibility of past experiences being healed; pain that can otherwise paralyze us.

Returning to our Gospel reading today, when Jesus appears to the disciples in the upper room, they are in a state of fear: they have lost their leader and they have locked themselves away for fear of the Jews. Three times he says the words, "Peace be with you.", establishing peace before anything else he says about purpose or power. The order is important here: He wants to establish peace *first*. Jesus offers them the gift of peace, the gift of power and the gift of purpose.

When Jesus sends his disciples out he teaches them to use the same greeting:

"And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house." (Luke 10:5)

As the disciples go out on their ministry, as we read about in Acts, they are not afraid, even though they face greater persecution. They preach the Gospel with great courage, even when imprisoned.

Of course, the peace that Jesus offers the disciples is *also* peace that he accomplished when he died for them on the cross. And that peace is offered to us as well. The peace that He died for our sins; any separation that existed between God and us was absorbed on the cross.

That peace *can go* further than us and God. It can stretch to others (and I believe we yearn for this), regardless of race, background, sexuality.

Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, said:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

When we look around the world peace may seem impossible, we can still find peace in our hearts and with God.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4)

Amen