

“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.””

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Isn't it a joy to continue to celebrate that wonderful good news and all that it means for us?! Jesus lives, and because He lives we can be sure that our sins are forgiven and that we have life and salvation through faith in Him. Jesus lives, and that means that the power that sin, death and the devil had over us is destroyed forever. Jesus lives, and in His life we have the sure and living hope that God will be with us to help us, to bless us and to strengthen us as we struggle through the cares and worries of our life. He will be with us in all things to see us through, and to give us the victory that is ours in Christ. Day by day, we can be sure that the world is different, that our lives are different because of the Resurrection. Jesus lives! And so we gather today as we do every Sunday to remember, to rejoice and to celebrate the life that is ours through the death and the glorious resurrection of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In these weeks after Easter, the Scripture lessons remind us again and again of the blessings that are ours through the life-changing power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And one of the greatest of the blessings that are ours in the Risen Christ comes through the simple greeting that the resurrected Lord shares with His disciples as He appears to them and says, ***“Peace be with you.”*** From anyone else, that would be a polite greeting, a simple prayer for a happy life. But when spoken by the Living Lord, it is the promise of a real and lasting peace, a peace that we so desperately need as we face the struggles of life in this world. And today we want to rejoice in the peace that is ours through the living Lord and Saviour.

Almost everyone is familiar with the Nobel Peace Prize, given each year to the individual or individuals who have done the most for the cause of peace in our world. There have been many controversial recipients of that award over the years, but no one is more deserving of that prize each and every year than is our Saviour, Jesus Christ. When Jesus says to His disciples, ***“Peace be with you”***, He bestows on them the peace that has been the purpose of His entire life, death and resurrection. When Jesus was born, the angels filled the skies around Bethlehem with a wonderful hymn: ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*** (Luke 2:14, ESV) Jesus came to bring peace, the peace between God and man that is lost because of our sin. By giving Himself in our place upon the cross, Jesus has brought the forgiveness that we need because of our sinfulness; the forgiveness that is necessary if we are to be at peace with God. It is through this atoning sacrifice of Christ that St. Paul can say: ***“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.”*** (Ephesians 2:14–15, ESV) Paul also assures us through the Holy Spirit: ***“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** (Romans 5:1, ESV)

If Jesus had not died for us on the cross, then there could be no peace for us. As we just sang in the hymn: ***“If Your beloved Son, O God, Had not to earth descended And in our mortal flesh and blood Had not sin's power ended, Then this poor, wretched soul of mine In hell eternally would pine Because of my transgression.”*** (LSB 568, st. 1) Thankfully, the grace of God is greater than our sin, and Christ did die and rise for us. As the hymn goes on to assure us: ***“But now I find sweet peace and rest; Despair no more reigns o'er me. No more am I by sin oppressed, For Christ has borne sin for me. Upon the cross for me He died That, reconciled, I might abide With You, my God, forever.”*** (LSB 568, st. 2) This is exactly the joy and peace the disciples felt in our text as the resurrected Christ stands before them and says—not once, but twice: ***Peace be with you.*** John tells us how they all felt: ***Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*** They knew—they felt—the peace which only the Living Lord can bring to the hearts and lives of His people.

My dear people, loved by God, we need that peace each and every day! We tend to think of peace only in relationship to war—as the opposite of war. Peace is the calm that we feel in the midst of all of life's turmoil. The hope and victory we have in Christ sustains us in the midst of all the things that would rob us of our peace. It is almost mind-boggling to think of all the things that we see around us, even as the glory of Easter radiates around us. Although Christ has won the victory over the devil, we can see that the devil still fights on, doing his best to destroy the peace that is ours in Christ by first destroying peace in our lives.

How distressing it is to hear that seven youths have been charged with second-degree murder in the death of a 16-year-old Edmonton boy. Six boys—two only 14 years old, and a 17 year old girl, assault and kill another youth. This didn't happen in a war-torn area. It wasn't a gang riot in a place like New York City. It was here, close to home. We continue to hear about the war in Ukraine. There is no peace, and I know many of our members have remembrances of similar violence in their lifetime. I'm sure that you heard the sirens of fire trucks or ambulances this week. Shootings and accidents and disasters and war still happen in our world. The devil uses all of these things to rob us of the peace that God wants us to enjoy. These things—and countless others like them, bring fear, worry and uncertainty into our lives. They start to make us wonder, “where is the peace that you spoke of Lord?” If you have given us peace, why do things seem so unsettled in our lives?

And if that isn't enough, it still seems that, in spite of the resurrection, we have all the same problems that we deal with each day. Yes, Jesus rose from the dead, but we still see struggles between husband and wife, between parent and child. Then where is the peace that Jesus gives? We still have our own doubts and uncertainties about our jobs, our future, our well-being. Where is the peace? We still have the pains and illness we had before Easter. And our society is still filled with violence and terrorism, with crime and corruption. Where is the peace?

The prophet Isaiah once wrote: ***“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.”*** (Isaiah 26:3, ESV) The peace which Jesus gives is that perfect peace, the peace which, St Paul tells us, ***“surpasses all understanding”***. (Philippians 4:7, ESV) Before Easter, before His crucifixion, Jesus had told the disciples: ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”*** (John 14:27, ESV) Jesus did not promise the kind of peace that made everything wonderful in this world. In fact, Jesus warned his followers that they would not have a peaceful life in the here and now. You will be hated and persecuted because of me, Jesus told them. Your lives will be difficult because you are my followers. And then He told them: ***“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*** (John 16:33, ESV)

The victorious Lord stood before His disciples, having defeated all their enemies of sin, death and the devil. His resurrection is the iron-clad proof that He has overcome the world. He has carried all our sins and all the pains that sin brings so that we can know His real and lasting peace. That peace changed everything for the disciples. Even when they were arrested and threatened with greater punishments because of their preaching, they had the peace in their hearts which enabled them to say: ***“We must obey God rather than men.”*** (Acts 5:29, ESV) Those same men who had locked themselves away in fear of the Jewish leaders now preached the message of salvation in the Risen Lord. They had His peace upon them, and not the Sanhedrin, not the world, not even the devil could take that peace away from them.

The Risen Lord gives that same perfect peace to us. Since we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, we can be sure that He will, as He has said, keep us in perfect peace at all times. Even when the fiercest storms cause the ocean to be in turmoil, with crashing wind and waves, there is peace and calm in the depths of the ocean. And that is the peace that Jesus brings—the inner peace and tranquillity that is undisturbed by the storms and agitation of our life. In those very moments when the devil works so hard to rob us of our peace, the Living Lord comforts us with the Spirit, who brings us His peace, the peace that passes understanding. In those dark moments of doubt and fear, we have peace because Jesus has overcome the world and has won the ultimate victory. ***Peace be with you,*** Jesus says. He brings peace into our hearts as He takes away our sin and guilt. He brings us peace as He lives to silence all our fears. He brings peace, as He leads us through the darkness and turmoil of this world into the sure and certain hope of eternal glory. Peace be with you, not the fleeting peace of the world, but peace as only the Risen Lord can give it. Amen.