

Sermon preached by Rev Rachel McDougall

Easter 6C

St Paul's Canterbury

Sunday 22nd May 2022

Resurrection is peace in companionship

Peace I leave you, my peace I give to you

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.

These are reassuring words. To listen to these words brings about a peace within.

To hear them is to be reminded of the living peace in which we are always held.

Jesus is answering a question that a disciple has asked:

How is it that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?

He answers it by saying 'love me and keep my words.'

Jesus reminds them that that Father and Jesus will continue to love them and make their home with them and that he leaves them with his peace.

Peace is about God's presence being at home in us.

Peace is God's presence with us, it is a peace that passes all understanding as that familiar blessing goes.

Peace is about closeness and companionship.

Jesus being risen from the dead is about God's living presence that continues on. Easter is about God's peace continuing to live on in us. Jesus is promising his followers as he leaves them that the peace of his presence will continue to be with them.

The church that John wrote to knew this already. They were a community that were continuing on in the experience of the risen Jesus being present with them through the Spirit.

It is worth remembering that John wrote these words 60 years after Jesus had died and risen and ascended into heaven.

They are already living the reality of what Jesus' had promised.

What does God's peace look like?

It is not as the world gives. It is something much deeper and richer.

We are living in times that do not make for peace.

We long for peace. Many of us are exhausted by the last couple of years and find it hard to pay attention to much.

Many of us are anxious by the uncertainty of these times as we worry about soaring costs and experience or hear other's experience of suffering and the brutal reality of violence, disrespect and war that we see nightly on our tv screens.

It is easy to seek peace by losing ourselves in distractions and yet the momentary calm we get doesn't last.

What does it mean to us that Jesus' peace is left with us?

Jesus' peace is a gift given to us.

It is always there for us.

The gift of God's living presence within us.

The promise is that God's companionship is here with us.

The holy Spirit continues to teach and remind us.

It is so easy for us to forget God's peace living in us. We need to be reminded and draw on the Spirit who puts us back together in God's peace.

God's peace is God's shalom. It is never just the absence of war, or violence. It is also not just an individual thing.

It is never restricted to the inner peace of the soul.

God's peace has the sense of well-being, of wholeness and harmonious relationships, of restoration.

How do we enter into the reality of God's peace?

It is already here as a gift. It is found as we seek it, as we continue to be open to God's voice. It is to live life of quiet openness to life itself.

Joan Chittister talks about peace can be found as we have the ability to be stretched beyond ourselves by living lives in search of God. As we seek God's peace within us and around us we can find it.

The motto of the Benedictine order is peace. Above the door of every monastery is the words 'peace to those who enter here'.

When the Roman empire and the great roman peace was falling apart monasteries began to form and flourish. In the midst of chaos monasteries were beacons of peace where communities of people lived together in peace.

In a time when society appeared to be collapsing around them the monastery was a place of welcome where people lived in peace.

People found that they were listened to and respected by the religious community that welcomed them who were living

together in peace, who were becoming what peace meant in themselves.

Perhaps this is also who we are called to be as a Christian community today.

To extend peace to those we meet and welcome all who enter - that in the uncertainty of these days we can rest in the hope of the vision of John the Divine of heaven where there is everlasting peace where God is present and all are included.

To have peace we do have to become it ourselves as we come in touch with God's peace within ourselves, to come to an acceptance of who we are and where we find ourselves..

To receive God's peace deep within ourselves means that we can then offer it to others.

It is to be a community of peace where others find welcome, to offer peace to all those who enter here, that together we can be bearers of God's peace.

We find peace as we accept ourselves, and as we reach out to one another, that there too we can meet Christ.

There is a lovely Iona hymn which puts this well.

When I receive the peace of Christ
my loneliness shall end;
and I must reach a hand and take
my brother as a friend,
my brother as a friend indeed
who has an honoured place
where he may stand before the Lord
in dignity and grace.

When I receive the peace of Christ
my loneliness shall end;
and I must reach a hand and take
Christ Jesus as a friend,
Christ Jesus as a friend indeed
who has an honoured place
where now he stands amongst us all
in dignity and grace.

Peace be with you.

Lections:
Acts 16.9-15
Psalm 67
Revelation 21.10-14, 22.1-5
John 14.23-29