

Date: April 26, 2009

Title: Repentance Leads Us to Peace

Scripture:

Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. He said, "Peace be with you."

³⁷ But the whole group was terribly frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost!

³⁸ "Why are you frightened?" he asked. "Why do you doubt who I am? ³⁹ Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do!" ⁴⁰ As he spoke, he held out his hands for them to see, and he showed them his feet.

⁴¹ Still they stood there doubting, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he ate it as they watched.

⁴⁴ Then he said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me by Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must all come true." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand these many Scriptures. ⁴⁶ And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah must suffer and die and rise again from the dead on the third day. ⁴⁷ With my authority, take this message of repentance to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me.' ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of all these things. Luke 24:36-48 (NLT)

This is actually the 3rd Sunday of Easter according to the traditional church calendar. So, today I plan to continue the discussion of the Easter story. I don't follow the traditional calendar completely, but I think that the reason we have so many "Sundays of Easter" is because a lot happened in a fairly short time and it really does take more than one Sunday to talk about it. I suppose we could say that every Sunday for a Christian is Easter Sunday; every day for that matter. So, today we are going to explore the Easter story a little further.

This part of the story begins with Jesus sudden presence in the midst of the Disciples. The first thing he said to them was, "Peace be with you." From the sounds of it he could just as well have said, "Boo," with the effect his sudden presence had on them. And this is not surprising, really, when you think about it. The two people who had walked to Emmaus with Jesus had come back to tell the group that they had just talked with Him and he really isn't dead. And while they are telling about this remarkable experience, suddenly Jesus appears with them and says, "Peace be with you." I find it interesting that Jesus offers them "peace" and their first response is fear.

But I guess we shouldn't be surprised, really. I mean put yourself in their place. You could imagine that they were wondering just how long it would be till the same authorities that arrested Jesus would come after his followers. It only makes sense the disciples figured they would be next. So, they were hiding and into their midst came Jesus saying, "peace be with you."

Jesus was offering peace in the midst of their fear. He was offering peace in the midst of their confusion and grief. And He was offering peace in the midst of their shame. Of all the emotions that they would have been struggling with, I tend to think that the toughest of all would have been dealing with the shame. I mean, nearly every one of them had just abandoned the one who had walked with them, taught them, made them feel like they were a part of something real and important. While they were walking with Jesus, they must have felt like they were much more than a rag-tag bunch from the lower tiers of society. For about three years they were not just fishermen or tax collectors or shepherds, they were disciples of the Messiah. They had many reasons to believe that the man they were following was the living Son of God!

And then..... when the chips were down..... Jesus had to go through everything he endured virtually **by himself**. His mother and perhaps a few other women were there at the crucifixion and perhaps the apostle John, but every other disciple had run away fearing for their own safety; even Peter who had sworn just hours before Jesus' arrest that he would never turn away from his Lord. Imagine the guilt they must have felt as they reflected on the events of the previous few days. Imagine how they must have questioned their own self worth. Imagine how this shame mixed with fear, confusion, and grief would have paralyzed them and rendered them helpless.

And then, Jesus miraculously appeared right there in the room with them offering peace to their troubled souls. He immediately asked them for something to eat so that they would realize that he was not a ghost. He truly was returned from the grave. And slowly, they began to realize that their Messiah was indeed alive again standing in their midst.

Now, I want to ask you a question. Have you ever done something that you were not particularly proud of? Maybe you meant to or maybe you didn't mean to but what ever it was, someone got hurt or angry at you and you thought it might be better if you didn't see that person again right away. And then when you did see them again, you didn't really want to look them in the eye because you were ashamed? Probably that has never happened to anyone in this group because you are all such fine people that you would never do something that would put you at odds with another person. But maybe you know what I am talking about. See, I think that it is quite likely that the disciples were more than a little ashamed of themselves for the way they had abandoned Jesus in his hour of need and now they were standing right there in the same room with him.

Now, Jesus could have given them what-for. He could have made them feel all the more guilty for the way they abandoned him, but what did he do instead? He offered them peace. He offered them peace that I suspect most of them didn't believe they deserved. But there he was back from the dead opening their minds to the scriptures. And then He said, ***"With my authority, take this message of repentance to all the nations."***

Did you catch that? Take my ***message of repentance*** to all the nations. What does a message of repentance have to do with anything? Do you suppose that maybe the scriptures that Jesus was opening their minds to had something to do with repentance?

We are not sure of the exact words that Jesus used to convey a message of repentance to the disciples that day. Our text just says that Jesus “opened their minds to understand these many Scriptures.” But, I would like to suggest that perhaps He reminded them of how the scriptures are filled with stories of humanity’s constant back and forth struggle between living at odds with God and living in alignment with God; in biblical terms we would refer to it as a struggle between “sin” and “repentance.”

We don’t know exactly what Jesus said to open their minds that day, but I can think of a few scriptures He might have used:

- He might have reminded them of how King David led the people in the ways of the Lord caring for the alien and the stranger, having compassion for the poor, and repenting and turning back to God when He had personally sinned against God.
- He might have reminded them of how just one generation later, David’s son had changed the face of the kingdom to reflect the world of political power, dominance and wealth rather than reflecting God’s intended Kingdom.
- And then I think it is probable that He then let them know that He had come to lead the world; “*beginning in Jerusalem*” to understand that the resurrection power of Christ was power that could help every person, every city, every nation turn their lives away from being at odds with God toward lives lived in alignment with God.

Two weeks ago, I spoke about how Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross was suffering that connected each one of us to our merciful creator. So much of the suffering that we experience comes as a direct result of our sinful behavior. Not only did Jesus’ suffering and death connect us to God in *our* suffering it also came as a statement of forgiveness for all of our transgressions. The biblical pattern up till now was, Humans sin, they feel the consequences, they repent, God forgives.

What Jesus did was to take every sin that was ever committed or ever would be committed with him to the cross. The death of this innocent man, who was God, brought forth forgiveness for everyone of us so that we can, in all good conscience..... really!!!!.....in all good conscience turn from our mistakes and our self-centered ways and with confidence live boldly in the way that God would have us live.

What a blessing! No longer must we live shackled by the sin that has plagued humanity since the beginning. Now, that never ending cycle of sin, pain, repentance, and forgiveness has been broken for good and replaced with the grace of Jesus who is Christ. Of course we can still choose to live there in that cycle if we want to... and often we do. We are the children of Adam after all. But no longer do we need to carry that burden of guilt and shame around with us; that burden that sucks the life out of everything we do. No longer must we feel the need to avoid God, wondering if God is mad at us. Just like the disciples who received the mercy and grace of Christ that day, we too can receive it and we too can live in peace.

Imagine if you will that I am carrying a very large sack; full of all the guilt; all the shame; all the resentment; and all the fear that comes with all of that. After a while it gets to be a pretty big sack and the sack gets heavy. And all the time I am trying to move forward with my life, Jesus is calling me. I am steadily trying to go my own way away from God and all the time Jesus is asking me to turn back – to repent.

And as soon as I do, Jesus is standing there with nail-scarred hands reaching out to take my burden. And the first thing that He says as He takes my sack of; you know...*stuff*... is not, “What were you thinking?” but rather, “Peace be with you.”

It was peace that Jesus brought to the disciples. And when they were able to accept the gift of forgiveness that Jesus returned from the grave to bestow upon the world they were no longer paralyzed and helpless with fear and shame, they too were alive – not just breathing, but fully alive!!

It is that same peace that is still available to each one of us today.

- When we find that we are confused and troubled we need only to accept the risen Christ into our lives.
- When we find that we are afraid we need only to let go of our fear and take hold of the life giving power of the risen Christ.
- When we come to the realization that we have lived in a way that is contrary to the honor, integrity, mercy and love, that God wants for us.... we need only to repent and take hold of the power of Christ.

For when we do this in our own lives we experience a change. And with this change comes the authority to live boldly and to take this message of peace and repentance to all the nations.

Now, I know that at times it would seem like the world is just not ready for Jesus’ message of repentance and hope. It’s true that many are not. But we must live what we believe. And we must do all we can to share this message of hope with the authority and power of Christ. And no matter how crazy it gets; no matter how confused or frustrated we get; no matter how badly we have behaved...if we simply stop and turn from our sin, our fear, our shame or our confusion toward the one who died and rose again for each one of us, we will find him right there with us ready to lead, guide, encourage, and most important... forgive. And if we are listening, not with our ears, but with our hearts, we will hear Jesus say to us...”Peace be with you.”