

Unashamed Peace

It's clear from the lessons appointed for today that "peace" is the central theme. For instance, Old Testament Israel was constantly reassuring themselves with false peace. Your Lord says that they were "healing their own wounds" by bespeaking "peace" to themselves when there was no peace to be had. The Law of God had cut them to the core, but instead of repenting and fleeing to their Good Physician for His healing, they chose to remain in their sin and heal themselves. The corpse actually believed that he/she knew better than their Good Physician. They willfully remained at enmity with God... and proudly so. Your Lord says that things were so bad that the *people no longer knew how to blush*. Imagine. They were no longer ashamed of their sin. They were proud. They boasted. If anything, they shamed others for not being so tolerant and accepting. They shamed others for being so close-minded and hateful. *My... how things have changed.*

This garbage is still happening when St. Paul pens his epistle to the Roman Christians. Paul was willing to lay down his life it would mean God's peace for his fellow Jews (by birth), but they had rejected Christ. They called themselves "Israel," and found peace in their lineage. They didn't have the peace of Christ. They didn't want the peace of Christ, and they didn't even blush when they said it. We hear in our Gospel lesson that Jesus actually wept over the fact that His beloved people didn't know or understand the things that make for true peace. It tore Him up. It grieved Him...greatly. Contextually, we know that this event happened on Palm Sunday, as Jesus was processing down from the Mount of Olives and into Jerusalem. Looking out from a high vantage point above the city of Jerusalem, Jesus cried and lamented over their ignorance and their unbelief. *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!"*

Now, when all this is set into context, it makes perfect sense, doesn't it? It makes perfect sense to our ears that Jesus would shed tears and lament the ignorant unbelief of those people in Jerusalem who didn't understand what true peace is or where true peace was to be found; those people who were *vehemently opposed* to everything Jesus taught and stood for; those people who would ultimately have Him *murdered* by week's end. But here's an interesting question for you: *What about those folks who were on Jesus' side?* What about the apostles and Mary Magdalene and all those lining the streets with their palm leaves and shouting their loud hosannas? *Was Jesus weeping over and lamenting their ignorance too?*

Based on what we know from all four Easter Sunday Gospel accounts, even those closest to Jesus didn't get it. They didn't understand the things of true peace. The beloved women were making their way to that tomb on Easter Sunday

morning, not to greet their victoriously resurrected Savior as He emerged from the tomb after His Sabbath rest, **but to anoint a corpse**. They were all torn up and full of grief. Their guy was dead! And the apostles are even worse. We're told that they were hiding behind locked doors out of fear that they may be next. That's really sad! These guys spent three years at Christ's feet, listening to every Word He said, witnessing every miracle that bore witness to and proved His almighty divinity and Lordship. Jesus told them quite clearly and specifically **multiple times** that all of salvation and peace hinged on the **necessity** of Him being brutalized, put to death, and rising from the dead on the third day. They didn't get it. They didn't understand. They saw Christ's suffering and death as **failure**; not as victory and salvation. Even those closest to Jesus didn't know the things that make for true peace. Jesus was weeping for them too.

And you know what? When we start to recognize Christ's lamentation and weeping in this light, you can't help but squirm in your seat. **We're guilty too, aren't we? In fact, we're worse off.** We know what those first disciples didn't know. It would take the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost for them to finally come around to a fuller understanding of what that cross and resurrection meant. **Not one of them lived an easy life after that first Pentecost.** They all suffered for their faith again and again and again...and yet they did it all with a joy and peace that surpassed all understanding. Can we say honestly say that about ourselves?

Just take an honest inventory of your life. Understand: I'm not telling you to scrutinize all the other morons in our country who don't know the things that make for peace; those who act like **proud peacocks** as they fan their sinfulness in the face of God. **What about those sins that WE no longer blush at?** (Consider your life through the lens of God's Ten Commandments. If you're **not** blushing and ashamed, then you don't understand.) How often do our words and deeds indict us of the fact that we really don't know (or truly believe) **what true peace is or where it is to be found?** So often we seek peace in the wrong things, and fail to seek peace in the things of God. Be honest: How often do we, without blushing in the least, seek unity and peace in the wrong things; things like bylaws and potlucks and music and entertainment (especially for the children)? To be sure, these things can and do unite like-minded people, **but they are not the things of true peace.** They are not the means of God's grace and peace. They do not bestow or give God's peace and assurance.

What about rejecting/despising Christ and His Word? I know that sounds crazy to our ears, because what faithful Christian would **ever** reject/despise Christ...but hear me out. Here [*Word and Sacrament*] are the things that make for true peace. Here is God's peace, right here and right now. Are these means of grace rejected and despised? Is this peace of God rejected and despised by "good" Christians? **All the time, especially in this time of self-centered fear and self-**

preservation! This is what makes it all so maddening. I've shed plenty of tears over these past six months. God's peace and redemption, given so freely and fully in His own Body and Blood (just like He so clearly says)...and self-professed "good" Christians willfully plug their ears and turn their backs on it all. The fish are biting. The pool needs cleaning. Family is in town, and we certainly wouldn't want to take them to church with us. It's too hot. It's too cold. It's too germy. I have to wear a mask. Other people aren't wearing masks. I might get sick. What's most distressing is that people don't even blush when they say such things. I understand why Jesus wept. ***Here is Christ, right?*** Here is where the Lord of Life Himself miraculously feeds you with His ***incorruptible*** Body and Blood. We say we believe it, and yet.... We condone the fear and the rejection. We excuse it. Special circumstances call for special measures, right? We justify it, rather than repenting of it. ***Doesn't it all make you blush...even a little? It should.***

Look to the cross. What does this mean? Here [*the crucifix*] is the divine wrath of God against all sin, and believe it or not, it is here in this divine and righteous anger of God that we, through faith, are able to ***recognize His Gospel love for us.*** Here is where God pours out all His wrath and punishment against sin—***here, on Christ Jesus...not on you.*** Here is the One who has paid for each and every one of your sins on His cross; who died and rose again for you in order that you might have His gift of eternal life, and have it in overflowing abundance. ***This alone should make you hit your knees in repentant thankfulness and weep tears of joy!*** Here is the peace of God; the peace [singular] that surpasses all human understanding.

And the greatest thing of all is that none of this is hidden or done in secret. God wants nothing more than for ***everyone*** to partake and receive His absolutely free gifts of grace, mercy, and peace. He holds out these blood-bought gifts constantly to ***all*** people, stretching out His pierced hands and inviting ***everyone*** who is weak and wearied and afraid and beaten down and worn out; ***everyone*** who labors under the yoke and bondage of sin, to come to Him and be yoked to Him and His righteousness and His peace, "*for My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*" If only people would recognize and clamor for these things that make for true peace! ***This is what faith naturally does—it flees to Jesus. Faith wants all the Jesus it can get, and faith isn't afraid or ashamed of it either.***

Folks: Here is the peace that surpasses all understanding. I know it doesn't look like much, but richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad times and everything in between, here is the peace of Christ, freely held out to you. "*I am with you ALWAYS.*" No matter how bad life in this fallen and sinful world may get, we belong to Christ. ***Nothing and no one can ever snatch that away.*** No man can rent asunder the love that Christ has for us and gives to us.

These are the things of true peace. Rejoice! Be not ashamed! Let the world know and see and hear of the joy and peace and hope within you. May this peace of Christ bear abundant good fruit in your daily life, and may this same peace of God, which far surpasses all human understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, now and into all eternity. **AMEN**