

“PEACE FOR TROUBLED TIMES”

April 26, 2009

Luke 24:36b-48

Introduction:

In the lives of many in our country there have never been economic times like these. Except for those who lived through the Great Depression and World War II this combination of the War on Terror and the current recession are the worst combination of events in our lifetimes.

As a result many have lost their sense of security, or their jobs, chunks of their savings and retirement plans, even their homes and cars. Of course some of those losses were due to lifestyles that could not be sustained in tough times. Never-the-less, these are tough times and they have affected the sense of peace many people took for granted.

So, how can our faith in God help us reclaim the stabilizing peace we need in our lives in order not to be depressed and overly focused on our problems? Does the Bible say anything that will help us deal with these tough times?

For a start, let's look again at

The Lesson From Luke.

To set the stage, I remind you that Jesus had recently been crucified; he died, and was entombed in a

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cave.

His death took the life out of his disciples. All their false hopes in Jesus' reign as King of Israel were rightly dashed. Jesus had never promised them that being the current King of Israel was to be his outcome, but they projected it on him never-the-less. In fact, there were even discussions, and arguments, about which of them would rule with him – sitting on this right and left hand. Now, all those dreams – really illusions - were gone forever.

In the place of their dreams was confusion, feelings of hopelessness, anger, sadness, even some terror circulating amongst the disciples. Without Jesus, their entire sense of stability was threatened. Does that sound like contemporary times?

Then, to add to the confusion, some of the disciples were saying that Jesus might yet be alive. In fact, that Mary Magdalene woman was going around saying that Jesus was, indeed, alive. She said she had seen him and spoke to him. Who was this woman that Jesus befriended, who was now speaking with such authority? Could her testimony be trusted?

Not likely, given her former reputation. Yet, John and Peter confirmed that Jesus' tomb was empty.

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John even said he believed Jesus was alive. Such confusion, such fear – would the Romans be coming for the rest of the disciples to also crucify them? Who knew?

Like our times the question was, “What do we do now?”; “Where do we go?”; “What do we do next?” No one seemed to have the answer. A future that looked so bright, so exciting, so hopeful – collapsed so fast. It was shocking! Nothing felt right anymore. Everything was confused. Fear reigned. Depression set in. Where was God in all this?

So, the Inner Circle of disciples decided to get together once again to sort through everything; to encourage each other; to try and determine what to do next. They met in the same upper room in which they enjoyed their last supper with Jesus.

Peter and John were describing what they had experienced at Jesus’ empty tomb. There was also Mary’s witness to consider. It was an intense exchange. Some were advocating going back to the Galilee; some staying in Jerusalem to see what was going to happen next. Others were for scattering to the four winds – ‘don’t let them catch us together. If they do then they will charge us with conspiracy’. As a group they didn’t know what to do, and no one was a strong enough leader – even Peter

– to lead the group.

Then,

The World Changed Forever!

Suddenly, they were aware of Jesus standing in their midst. How did he get inside? The door was shut for fear of authorities. When did Jesus come inside? He just materialized in their presence, the way an angel might appear.

Then He spoke to the disciples, “*Peace be with you.*” Now, they were really terrified. A ghost was speaking to them. They had witnessed evil spirits speaking to Jesus while occupying someone else’s body, but none of them had ever heard a ghost speak before. They knew ghosts existed but ghosts were not supposed to be talking with people.

Yet here was Jesus, in what appeared to be his flesh and blood body, standing right in the middle of them. They were afraid yet, at the same time, drawn to him.

Like He always seemed to do, Jesus was aware of, and concerned about their fears, so he spoke the exact words they needed to hear, and the words we need to hear today:

“Peace, be with you.”

It wasn’t the first time Jesus spoke “peace” to

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them. In the 14th Chapter of John's Gospel, during the Last Supper after Judas left the room, Jesus makes this offer to them – and to us: *“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 ... for I have overcome the world.”*

In John 20:19-23, is the parallel account from Luke's Gospel of Jesus appearing to the Disciples in the Upper Room. Listen to John's description: *19On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” 22And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”*

Did you notice that Jesus' gift of peace is linked with four things: (1) It is linked to an appearance of himself in a person's life. Verse 20 - *The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.* If we want the peace

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Jesus gives we have to receive God's gift of Jesus into our lives. There is no getting around it.

Have you invited Jesus to come into your life – to come and stand in the midst of you? It is only from His presence that we can hear and receive his offer of peace. So, if you want to have peace today you also need to have Jesus in your life. The choice is yours.

(2) Jesus' gift of peace is linked with his call on our lives, sending us into our world to be his witness. Verse 21 - *"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* Maybe you already have a personal relationship with Jesus but you have been resisting his call on your life. After all, when you received him he came to you not only as your Savior, but also your Lord. As Lord he has the right to call you into his service because you've agreed to be part of his earthly body, the Church. As a member of his body you have a place in his ministry of reconciliation. He will ask you to use your time, your talent, and your treasure to support his efforts to reconcile the world unto himself. Are you yielding to, or resisting Jesus' call?

(3) To receive Jesus' gift of peace is also to receive the Holy Spirit. Verse 22 - *22And with that he*

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breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. The peace Jesus gives is a spiritual quality that cannot be reproduced in this world. It does not come to us because our earthly future is secure. It does not depend on the state of our mortgage, our job security, the health of our marriage, the relationship we enjoy – or not – with our children or parents. The size of our retirement account does not guarantee us any special spiritual connection with God. The gift Jesus gives us of the Holy Spirit is not temporal, it is spiritual.

So, have you allowed Jesus to fill you with the Holy Spirit? Without the counsel and teaching and witness of the Holy Spirit that we are (forever) God's children, we cannot fully enjoy the peace God wants us to have.

And (4), as spirit-filled, peaceful agents of Christ's ministry of reconciliation we are to be forgivers. Verse 23: *If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.*" People who are filled with the peace of Christ that defies worldly understanding are people who can afford to be very gracious. Having experienced such life-changing grace themselves, they understand what a difference it can make in someone's life when they experience forgiveness.

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So, how do we describe this peace that so transformed Jesus' dispirited disciples and has enabled Christians for 2000 years to keep going against all odds? Yes, even in times of trouble like we are going through now, people are looking for peace. Amen?

Listen to this

Description of Christ's Gift of Peace.

First of all, because it is not of this world peace does not mean lack of conflict. It is deeper than that. Spiritual Peace is a "Sense of well-being and fulfillment that comes from God and is dependent on His presence." It carries us through the tough times and storms of life that threaten to rip our lives apart.

The Greek word used in the New Testament to describe this peace is *eirene*. From it comes the name Irene. It was chosen because it most closely corresponds to the Hebrew word, "*shalom*", expressing the idea of peace, well-being, restoration, reconciliation with God, and salvation in the fullest sense. Such peace is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) that forms part of the "whole armor of God" (Eph. 6:11, 13), enabling the Christian to withstand the attacks of the forces of evil.

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In both the Old and the New Testaments, spiritual peace is realized in being rightly related—rightly related to God through Jesus Christ and rightly related to one another, and ultimately at peace with ourselves.

Does The Peace Christ Offers Us In Relationship With Him Work In Our Daily Lives?

I share my own testimony: After accepting this job, my life became much more stressful than I anticipated. The stress of leading us into a secure future, of going through an incredibly busy first seven months; the stress of preparing a house for sale, of fixing, painting, giving things away, moving other things into storage, trying to leave the house ready to show every day; the stress of a collapsing housing market and no prospective buyers coming to see our house; the stress of commuting two hours that came out of family time; the stress of less quality time to spend with my wife, missing out on daily events with the children; the stress of the children growing increasingly less interested in moving from one high school to another; all this was corrosive to my spiritual life and my sense of deep spiritual peace. I wasn't staying close enough to Jesus through the Holy Spirit and I suffered greatly for that slippage.

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So, the past month has been a time for being more intentional in reestablishing that relationship with Christ that results in a deeper spiritual and emotional peace; for reestablishing more peaceful relations with my wife and family, and with my church family.

The good news is – if we seek the Lord with our entire heart – He will be found. For the truth is, He never left. He is always here – right here! What he wants us to have is a deep, meaningful relationship; and relationships are two way streets. I am more at peace today with my Lord, my wife, my family, and my church than I was a month ago.

I share this with you as encouragement. In John's gospel Jesus describes the Holy Spirit in terms of wind. We don't control the wind. We don't know from which direction the wind will flow one minute to the next. Such it is with the Holy Spirit. God moves with sovereignty in our lives, not subject to our control or even our complete understanding. But like the wind, the Holy Spirit is seeking to flow into our lives because God desires to have a personal relationship with each of us. We cannot control the Holy Spirit but we can resist God's

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initiative by creating walls to control, or keep out, or prevent too much intimacy with God.

Like the wind, the Holy Spirit can best flow into and through our lives when we lower our resistance. It's like the wind blowing through a city. The wind doesn't blow through the buildings, it flows around them. Our resistance is like those buildings. The Spirit of God is constantly seeking to flow through our lives; only we put up walls of resistance and the Spirit ends up flowing around us instead of through us.

In these troubling times we can enjoy much more peace than we have if we consciously lower our resistance to God and seek the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives to counsel, instruct, and comfort us, bringing the peace Jesus, Himself, offers us.

Scripture says we have not because we ask not; and when we ask we ask incorrectly because we ask to satisfy our own lustful agenda. Instead, let us ask for Christ's peace for the sole purpose of enjoying relationship with God. God, in turn, out of love for us will fill us with peace and wisdom to make good decisions in the midst of troubled times.