

To God Alone Be The Glory

PEACE BE WITH YOU. Three times in today's Gospel Jesus said, PEACE BE WITH YOU. But what did he mean?

What is peace?

I pulled out my trusty Webster's dictionary and found several definitions of the word "peace." This one first: "An agreement to end hostilities between those who have been at war." With hostilities simmering in the Middle East, ...with terrorist attacks and counterattacks in New Zealand and Sri Lanka, we could use some peace like this in the world. How wonderful if all our soldiers returned home from Afghanistan and Korea and Syria to be with family! But it doesn't look like there will be any agreements to end any hostilities anywhere any time soon. And even if the two sides in any conflict were to stop attacking each other, that wouldn't change the hostile feelings in the hearts of those who formerly were at war. It would merely mean that no one would be acting on those hostile feelings. History demonstrates that agreements to end hostilities are either temporary or are eclipsed by other warring parties elsewhere in the world. So it's safe to say, Jesus did not have this kind of peace in mind when he said, PEACE BE WITH YOU.

My dictionary's next definition of peace is: "A state of tranquility or quiet, especially freedom from civil disturbance

or war; public order or security as provided by law." That's what we are enjoying this morning. There is no open warfare in Lake City. No gangs are gathered outside to tag our cars while we worship the Lord and try to understand his Word. And while this kind of peace is wonderful, it doesn't go far enough: many of us still lock our doors at home, and many of us work in buildings where there is some kind of security checkpoint. So it's safe to say, Jesus did not have this kind of peace in mind when he said, PEACE BE WITH YOU.

The next definition of peace in my dictionary touches on peace at home and in school and at work: "Harmony in personal relations." We could surely use more peace in this area. Domestic squabbles have touched most of our lives. You probably remember a time when it was nice and quiet in your home because so-n-so wasn't there to stir things up and put everyone on edge. If you happen to be blessed with a wonderfully peaceful home life, you're probably single and living by yourself—being single can be a blessing. But singles can still relate to the need for harmony among people. Some folks are just hard to get along with, usually because they are so focused on themselves that they are inconsiderate of others. Certainly you children who are in school can appreciate how great it would be if certain kids at your school would just be nice. If this is what Jesus meant when he said, PEACE BE WITH YOU,

then his words weren't very powerful, and we probably ought to open an investigation to see if Jesus is worth calling Lord and Savior.

See how we have moved from national wars to society to interpersonal relationships? And yet we still haven't found the kind of peace Jesus was talking about. My dictionary, however, has one more definition of peace. This kind of peace takes place in our minds:

“Freedom from fears, agitating passions, or moral conflict.” I think we're getting close. Freedom from fears? Well, maybe not so close. We Christians still have lots of fears showing up in our minds. If we aren't afraid of dying, we're afraid of thieves, or of losing our health, or of running out of money, or of being alone. We fear for our loved ones. We're not supposed to be afraid like this. But truth be told, there's not always peace on this front. *Agitating passions? If you never get upset about anything, you better check your pulse and your temperature—you may be dead, or perhaps heavily medicated. Agitating passions? No, not always peace on this front either. *Moral conflict? Being a pastor, I get to talk to or observe a lot of people who face moral conflicts. Being a sinner, I face moral conflicts. Being a Bible student, I know what God's Word says about the constant moral conflicts we have because the stinking, lousy sinful flesh resides in all of us and won't let up and won't let up—always wanting what is contrary to God's will as revealed

in the Bible. Not always peace on this front.

Friends, my dictionary ran out of commonly used definitions of peace. And we still have not discussed what Jesus meant when he showed up on that first Easter evening and said to his disciples, PEACE BE WITH YOU. I guess we'll have to turn to our knowledge of God's Word for answers.

“PEACE BE WITH YOU” was a common greeting in Bible times. In Hebrew it's “*Shalom lachem.*” In Greek, “*Eipnvn humin.*” PEACE BE WITH YOU. This greeting was so common that writers normally never wrote it down when reporting conversations. So for Jesus to repeat it draws our attention: PEACE BE WITH YOU.

The disciples needed peace. They were huddled together behind locked doors for fear of what the Jewish leaders might do to them since Jesus had been successfully executed on Good Friday. But it also disturbed them that Jesus' body was now missing. Oh, sure, the women had told these men they had seen Jesus alive, but you know how things can sometimes be between men and women. Besides, the soldiers whom Pilate sent to guard the tomb were spreading the lie that the disciples had come and snatched the body of Jesus while the soldiers were sleeping. Wouldn't you hide? To make things more confusing for the rest of the disciples, Peter now claimed that Jesus

had appeared to him earlier in the day. If you want agitating news, try processing the report about Jesus that the two disciples just brought back from their trip to Emmaus. There was little peace in the minds of the disciples in the room where they were meeting that first Easter evening. No wonder Jesus said to them twice, PEACE BE WITH YOU. The other Gospels report that the disciples didn't believe their eyes at first. One wonders whether they felt a little guilty for having abandoned Jesus in Gethsemane after promising to lay down their lives for him. They needed to hear those words repeated: PEACE BE WITH YOU. "I do not hold against you that you ran away when I was arrested. PEACE BE WITH YOU."

But how much does this kind of peace cost? Jesus showed them his hands and side as if to say, "See? This is the price of peace between me and you. Sin requires punishment if it is to be atoned for. But see my hands and my side? The price has been paid. PEACE BE WITH YOU." Now that's a definition of peace you'll find only in Christian sources: cessation of hostilities between God and man through the death of God's Son Jesus.

And now that Jesus has established peace between God and mankind, he wants his followers to tell others. "Tell them what, Jesus?" Tell them their sins are forgiven if they repent, that is, if they are sorry and intend not to repeat those sins. And tell them their sins stick to them if they

do not repent. "Oh, I could never do that. I don't have the right to forgive sins." But you do, dear Christian! You do! The door to heaven can be passed through only by those who believe their sins are forgiven by God for Jesus' sake. Jesus himself has put a set of keys to that door in your hands, and he wants you to use them in the same way that he uses them. Don't be afraid. It is so simple that even children can understand. To use the keys properly on someone, all you have to do is find out from them how they feel about the particular sin that has popped up. If they are sorry, tell them they are forgiven for Jesus' sake. If they are not sorry, tell them they are not forgiven, that is, they will have to face the final judgment with that sin still on their record. If they know anything about sin, they will know that one sin is bad enough in God's eyes to qualify us for hell forever. Reminding them that they will have to face the Lord with that one sin still on their record might be enough to get them to think whether they really want to lose out on heaven because of that one sin they are holding onto. If a Christian whose sin has been retained onto him/her still has any saving faith at all, that Christian will come back to you and say something like, "I don't want to face the judgment with this sin on my record. I have put the sin behind me. Please tell me I'm forgiven." That's when you know the locking key has done the work for which God himself designed it. Then it will be time for the unlocking key to do the work for which God designed

it. Swing open the door to heaven by saying, “Your sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. PEACE BE WITH YOU.” What was that? “PEACE BE WITH YOU.”

You know, when you have peace between you and the Lord, the other kinds of peace become more accessible. When moral conflicts get resolved in believing hearts, it sounds something like this: “I have peace with God through Jesus. I want to follow God’s morals. Please help me, Lord. I want to think your way.” If you’ve put Christ’s peace into practice in this way, you know it works. And when the sinful flesh comes back around for another go at you, pray again, reminding yourself what Jesus did for all. Christ’s PEACE will BE WITH YOU.

Fears? Say along with the Psalmist: *“When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid”* (Psalm 56:3-4). Keep praying like this until the Lord replaces your fear with his peace. He will.

Disharmony in your personal relations? Jesus’ peace can positively influence the state of peace here too. Just say to yourself about the one you have conflict with: “For this one too Jesus died. If Jesus loves this rascal as much as he loves me, who am I to show lack of love? No, I will work at being considerate so I am not the one who stirs up trouble, not at home, not at school, not at work, not at church. And if others stir up trouble, I will not

snap off a snarky retort. And I will pray for them and watch for opportunities to do good to them. Christ’s peace is on me. He said so. I’m forgiven for all my antagonistic behaviors because of Jesus. Therefore I will be a peacemaker in all my personal relations.”

Consider this: if all of us Christians would speak up about the kind of peace Jesus brought us, peace could spread throughout our communities. If everyone had Christ’s peace in their hearts, who would be left to disturb the peace with loud music, domestic squabbles, or hostile behaviors? No activists would feel a need to demonstrate in the streets, because there would be no longstanding issues of injustice troubling society. In fact, if the whole world knew the wonderful peace of sins forgiven through Jesus’ death, would there ever be a need to go to war? No nation would try to take what belonged to another nation. No nation would hoard their wealth to the detriment of the others.

“That’s all well and good, Pastor, but there will never be world peace on this side of Judgment Day.” You’re right, but so what! Just because it won’t ever be achieved does not mean we should stop trying for it. Jesus said, PEACE BE WITH YOU. “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” PEACE BE WITH YOU. Your sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus. PEACE BE WITH YOU. Let’s busy our lives spreading peace to others.