

The Peace of Easter  
Acts 10:34-43 & John 20:1-18

*“You know the message (God) sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ...” Acts 10:36*

This morning we gather to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His resurrection is recounted in the gospel we just read. In John 20:1-18 we find Mary weeping beside an empty tomb when suddenly the risen Savior speaks her name and she turns to find him standing near. Falling at his feet, she worships him then rises and runs to the other disciples saying simply, “I have seen the Lord.” And since that day, many besides Mary have seen him too! I have. Have you?

Yes, we gather this morning to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But as important as the resurrection is, it cannot be divorced from the other events in Jesus life. His life, his death, his burial, his resurrection, and his ascension are all of one piece and all serve one purpose. What is that purpose? That purpose is this: The life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus provide peace with God.

In Acts 10:36, while preaching to a Roman centurion called Cornelius, the apostle Peter said, “You know the message (God) sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ.” Peter then followed those words with a short summary of the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus in order to show that Jesus is the one who makes this peace possible. In this sermon I want to examine three things. I want to examine who needs this peace; who gives this peace; and who gets this peace with God.

First, let’s examine who needs this peace – this peace with God. Who needs this peace? You need this peace! I need this peace! All need this peace with God! For you see, the Bible says, “...all have sinned.” (Romans 3:23). And sin is a form of rebellion against God. It is rejecting God’s will and rejecting his way. In fact, it is rejecting God himself. That’s why the Bible says we are enemies of God in our natural and sinful state. According to Romans 8:7-8, “...the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God’s laws, and it never will. That’s why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.” (NLT)

So you see, unless you have received the peace of God, you are at war with God. You are a rebellious sinner – rejecting God’s will; rejecting God’s way; even rejecting the great God himself. But you may think you’re not like that. You may think you’re not a sinner. You may think you’ve never rebelled against God. But be advised, if you think that way, those very thoughts are evidence of your rebellion because God has already said, “...there is none righteous, no, not one...all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:10, 23) Who are we to deny the word of God? As the scripture says, “...let God be true and every man a liar.” (Romans 3:4 KJV)

Nevertheless, let's suppose you're not living in open defiance of God. In fact, let's suppose you're a religious person. You believe in God in a general way. You go to church or chapel now and then. You drop something in the offering tray whenever it passes by. You even say an occasional prayer and try to live a good life. In fact, you look a lot like Cornelius – the soldier in our text. Acts 10:2 says Cornelius “was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God.”

By earthly standards, Cornelius was a good man. Nevertheless, as good as he was, something was missing. He was on his way toward peace with God but hadn't yet attained it. So God sent an angel to Cornelius saying, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter.” (Acts 10:4-5) When those men arrived at Peter's place, the Spirit spoke to Peter's heart and said, “...go with them without hesitation.” (Acts 10:20) And Peter went as he was told and preached the sermon he was given – preaching peace by Jesus Christ.

And in preaching to Cornelius, Peter proved that no matter whom you are, the vilest of sinners or the most respectable of the religious, everyone needs the gift of peace – peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. For in and of ourselves, and by our own efforts, none of us can establish peace with God. It is God's alone to offer and his alone to give. Which brings us to our second point: Who gives this peace – this peace with God? God gives this peace through Jesus Christ! In the words of Acts 10:36, “You know the message (God) sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ.”

Peter followed those words with a brief description of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, ascension, and current action. First, Peter pointed to Jesus' life saying, “That message (i.e. God's message of peace through Jesus Christ), that message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem.” (Acts 10:37-39a) You see, Jesus' life demonstrated God's peaceful intention. Everywhere he went Jesus did good and healed the wounds of a hurting and helpless humanity. If you haven't read the gospels lately, read them again and you will see that Jesus' whole life demonstrated God's peaceful intentions toward a rebellious humanity.

Not only did Jesus' life demonstrate God's peaceful intention but his death provided God's peaceful solution. In verse 39, Peter said, “They put him to death by hanging him on a tree.” You see, Jesus' death provided a peaceful solution to our sinful rebellion. How? How did Jesus' death provide a peaceful solution for our sinful rebellion?

Well the Bible tells us that God is just. And because he's just, he must punish our wrongdoing. But the Bible also says God is love. And because he loves us, he doesn't

want to punish us. So God sent his Son to bear the punishment for our sin. And Jesus willingly bore our sin and its punishment on the Cross. And so God poured his just judgment against our sin on the precious head of his dear Son! And because the punishment was borne by Jesus Christ, we don't have to bear it. We can be forgiven! And if we are forgiven then we are at peace with God.

The prophet Isaiah describes what Jesus did in the following fashion. Isaiah says, "...he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed." (Isaiah 53:5 NLT)

And Paul describes it this way in Romans 5:8-10, "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son." (Romans 5:8-10 NLT)

So you see Jesus' life demonstrated God's peaceful intention and his death provided God's peaceful solution. Finally, his resurrection continues his peace-giving mission. Returning to Peter's sermon to Cornelius, Peter said, "They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (Acts 10:39-43)

According to Peter, Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven where he serves to judge both the living and the dead. And as you know, a judge has power both to condemn and to acquit. As our Judge, Jesus has the power to acquit us and to give us peace with God.

So far we've seen who needs this peace and who gives this peace. Now let's see who gets this peace. Who gets this peace – this peace with God? Only those who believe in Jesus! Back to Peter's sermon, Peter said, "(Jesus) is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (Acts 10:43)

As we previously saw, we're already condemned because of our sin. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God – Romans 3:23. And the wages of sin is death – Romans 6:23. And it is appointed unto man, once to die and after this the judgment – Hebrews 9:27. And 2 Thessalonians 2:12 says, "...all who...took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned." Yes, in our natural state, we stand condemned.

But according to Peter and the prophets, all who believe in Jesus receive forgiveness for their sins. In other words, we receive peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus, as judge, pronounces an acquittal. He acquits us, not because we are innocent and deserve the acquittal, but because he bore our sin and its punishment on the Cross. The price has been paid. And he forgives all who believe in him.

But what does it mean to believe in Jesus? First, believing in Jesus means believing certain facts about Jesus. It means believing that his life, death, burial, and resurrection happened. It means believing that he did everything necessary to secure peace with God and forgiveness for sin. It means believing that he lives today as Lord of all and is Judge of both the living and the dead.

But more than all of this, it means trusting him and entrusting yourself to him. It's entrusting the whole of life to the control of Christ. It's saying to Jesus, "Lord Jesus, I believe you lived and died and rose again to give me God's peace. Forgive me for making your death a necessity because of my sin. Thank you for offering me the gift of God's peace. I receive it. Here I am; I'm yours and you are Lord of all! Amen." When you do that, you're forgiven. And in the words of Romans 8:1, 34 – "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us." Yes, he intercedes for us and gives us God's peace.

Very quickly, I want you to notice what happened to Cornelius and his household as Peter preached this message. Acts 10:44-48 says, "While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."

Clearly they believed and, as a sign of their belief, they were baptized into the faith of Jesus Christ. Among other things, baptism signifies the forgiveness of sin. We are washed in the water and our sins are washed away. Today, we will baptize two people who have trusted Christ and received his peace – Tasha Eisenhower and Chris Thompson. But what about you? Have you received God's peace?

On January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014, Hiroo Onoda died in a hospital in Tokyo at age 91. Hiroo Onoda was the last Japanese soldier to surrender after World War II. He surrendered to Philippine forces on Lubang Island in March of 1974 – 29 years after Japan surrendered to the Allied Powers – 29 years after peace was won. For 29 years he hid in the jungles fighting a war that didn't need to be fought and refusing a peace that was repeatedly offered. Fortunately, on his 52<sup>nd</sup> birthday, he came to his senses and surrendered to those who had once been his enemies but who now received him as a friend.

My friend, are you still fighting a war that doesn't need to be fought? Are you refusing a peace that God repeatedly offers? Isn't it time to come out of the wilderness of your sin to accept the peace of God offered through his risen and conquering Son? Isn't it time you surrendered? If you know in your heart that you are not yet at peace with God then I invite you to pray this prayer: "Lord Jesus, I believe you lived and died and rose again to give me God's peace. Forgive me for making your death a necessity because of my sin. Thank you for offering me the gift of God's peace. I receive it. Here I am; I'm yours and you are Lord of all! Amen."

If you prayed that prayer accepting God's peace, then I assure you, you have received God's peace. Now you need to tell somebody. I encourage you to speak with one of our chaplains and/or send us an e-mail. We would love to hear from you and talk to you about the next steps in your spiritual journey.