

Third Sunday of Easter
April 14, 2024
Acts 3:11-21
1 John 3:1-7
Luke 24:36-49

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

There are many sources of uncertainty in the world. Day in and day out, we are bombarded with information which has little to no direct impact on our lives. Man once saw knowledge as the thing that would make us like God. Now, we are learning that drowning in information takes us very far away from God. The deluge of information flowing through electronic channels only increases our uncertainty. We have more and more information, but our useful knowledge is being diminished. We are not wiser. “Wisdom is recognizing the significant within the factual.” The Age of Reason with its foundations in the scientific method led to a great human confidence in what we can know. With more information available to us than ever, what we can know with confidence is a shrinking commodity. Given the former expectations, it is a great disappointment how the original insatiable desire for knowledge has produced a surplus of information along with much uncertainty, turmoil, instability, and insecurity.

In the immediate aftermath of the crucifixion, the disciples must have felt much uncertainty. After years of following Jesus, placing their hopes in Him as the Messiah, giving up the life they had before His ministry, and experiencing the fulness of His miracle-working presence, He was dead in a tomb. They could know one thing for sure: Their rabbi had been executed, and their world was turned upside down. The list of feelings they experienced and the causes: foolishness for putting their hopes in Him, sadness for losing His friendship, despair over the lost hope of restoration, fear that the same thing would happen to them, uncertainty over what to do next, insecurity over the lost confidence they had when they were with Him, guarded optimism that the rumors of His resurrection might be true. Jesus breaks through the rumors, the sadness, and the silence with a powerful word, “Peace be with you.” We can be at peace only when we know He is with us in His flesh, through the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.

We have peace with Christ in the incarnation. What was promised for so long before Christ came into the world was confirmed in the incarnation. God promised, through Isaiah, that the servant of the Lord would “be a light for the Gentiles” and “bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”² Paul notes that, “No matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘yes’ in Christ.”³ In the incarnation, the Word was made flesh, bringing to fulfilment the many and long-awaited promises of God’s redemptive work. It was too small a thing to restore the lost tribes of Jacob. Everyone here, whether of Gentile or Jewish ethnicity, can point to the incarnation as the fulfilment of God’s promise to restore Israel and bring salvation to the Gentiles. The fulfilled promises of God in the Word made flesh give us peace.

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *DBW:6 Ethics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2005), 81.

² Isaiah 49:6

³ 2 Corinthians 1:20

The incarnation is also a confirmation of God's faithfulness to Israel even though Israel was not always faithful to God. Ezekiel says, "You trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his."⁴ Yet God continued to plead with His people, "Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall... Repent and live!"⁵ God confirms Israel in the incarnation of Christ. Jesus is the great High Priest of Israel who calls them to repentance from His throne of grace. He fulfills the promise to Israel, "You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God."⁶ The angels announced a new reality when they sang out, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to men on whom His favor rests."⁷ Simeon reaffirms this new reality when he poetically states, "You now dismiss your servant in peace. For mine eyes have seen your salvation... a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."⁸ Like Simeon, we have peace in the incarnation of Christ. We can dwell securely because we are His people and He is our God.

In the incarnation, God confirms humanity. By becoming human, Christ takes responsibility for all that is human. He takes responsibility for it and confirms it in love. He takes responsibility for all humans, the godless, the adulterer, the murderer, the substance abuser, the loveless, the greedy exploiter. He takes it into His own flesh, and nails it to the cross.⁹ While men strive to achieve purity, Christ strove to become guilty for our sake. "God loves human beings. God loves the world. Not an ideal human being, but human beings as they are; not an ideal world, but the real world."¹⁰ There is no greater confirmation of God's love for humanity than the incarnation of His Son. As insecure and as uncertain as we may be, we can find peace in Jesus becoming man for us.

Despite this confirmation of life in the incarnation, man suffers from a gluttony of overconfidence in himself. Those who called for Jesus' death did so in ignorance. What is our excuse? Modern man has declared, "What was holiest and mightiest of all that the has yet been owned has bled to death under our knives... What after all are all these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God."¹¹ We have pushed God to the margins of life, perhaps nodding in agreement to a cultural or political Christianity on Sunday, but failing to live in the reality of Christ's presence the rest of the week. We have tested God's grace through rank hypocrisy even though we know that "he who does what is right is righteous."¹² Our love for the world is perverse, for quite often, we love many of the wrong things. Power, wealth, status – anything that might support our self-inflated view of ourselves, how important we are, and confirm our beliefs in how miserable everyone else is, this is what we love in our flesh. This perverse love of the world seeks to crucify Christ in us, putting Him to death to silence His call to repentance.

⁴ Ezekiel 16:15

⁵ Ezekiel 18:30 & 32

⁶ Ezekiel 36:28

⁷ Luke 2:14

⁸ Luke 2:29-32

⁹ Colossians 2:14

¹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *DBW:6 Ethics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2005), 84.

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: random House, 1974), 181-182.

¹² 1 John 3:7

The only certainty the flesh gains from this is certain death. The path to resurrection comes by way of dying to ourselves and being made alive in Christ.

Christ gives us peace in the resurrection of His flesh; He incorporates us into His death and resurrection, giving us life through the death that overcomes death. For the Christian, death is not accepted with the Stoic recognition of fate. Our death is redemption, for it puts us on the path that Christ has called us to travel. This is not to say that death is to be embraced. Pain and bitter anguish and tears of sorrow over such a loss is good. To feel nothing over death would be inhuman. We may even fear death, but the perfect love of Christ drives out our fear, strengthening us at the time we need it most. The incarnation and the resurrection point us to the fulfilled promises of God, and we place our trust on Him, the Rock of our salvation.

Our sin causes us uncertainty. As great as the flood of information is in our lives, the flood of our sin is even greater. The rushing condemnation of our sins can erode our confidence, but in the resurrection of Jesus, in His flesh, we know we stand forgiven. Even in the raging flood of guilt, oppression, and sorrow, we cling to the crucified flesh of Christ which overwhelms the power of sin with His gracious forgiveness. And the resurrection gives us peace in the victory Jesus won over the works of the devil. The light of the resurrection overcomes the darkness of our sin, our ignorance, and the prince of darkness. We have peace in His resurrection because it is our resurrection; we share in it through the refreshing flood of baptism where our old self is put to death. All that remains is the life we have in Him.

If we believe that Jesus came to be King only in the next world, we are not living in reality. He brings us peace through His ongoing presence, as King, even now in this world. There is peace in the word which is the breath of God's Spirit. How many times have you had the inner turmoil of your mind stilled by the Word in your ears or in your heart? The Spirit speaks to us in our insecurity and reminds us that God is still God, and we are still in His care.

The presence of Jesus is found in the Church, here and now, elsewhere tomorrow, wherever the Church is on earth. We should not take for granted this fellowship that we have, for it is a gift of grace that we have through Christ. We live, united in the body of Christ because He deigned to become man, to have a body, to live and die in our flesh, and to give our flesh new life in Him. Central to the life of the Church is the sacred meal we share at the altar. We have peace through this meal because it is where Christ is in His resurrected flesh, offering Himself to us there. He grants us admittance to the table reserved for the royal priests where His promises are confirmed. "Take, eat, this is My body. Take, drink, this is my blood." All this given for you for the forgiveness of your sins and the promise of life eternal. Here, at the altar of the Church, the world finds its salvation, its security, and its peace. The sacred meal is where His life is given to you. He brings the reality of His incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection into your body, and gives you peace.

Moses once challenged the people of Israel with the question, "Is the Lord in our midst or not?"¹³ We must ask ourselves if we believe this today. If we believe it, why do we so often act as though He is not? We are too restless and unsettled. We fail to live in the reality of who Christ is and whose we are. For we are totally His, bought with the price of His precious blood.

¹³ Exodus 17:7

We can live in reality when the information of who Jesus is becomes more than fact. You can have plenty of facts with very little knowledge. You can be exceedingly well informed, yet know nothing of significance. Our pursuit of knowledge, the embrace of real wisdom begins with the reality of Christ. And to live in peace is to live in the reality of a world redeemed by Christ. Do not allow the insistent interruptions of irrelevant information distort this reality. Christ has redeemed the world in His flesh. Your security is found in Him. Christ has redeemed you. Your certainty is found in Him. Christ has confirmed His love for you with His incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection in His flesh. Your peace is found in Him.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.