

PEACE BE WITH YOU

If you were able to watch the Royal Funeral Service yesterday, you would have heard THE COMMENDATION by the Dean of Windsor...as the remains of Prince Philip were lowered into the Royal Vault.

“GO forth upon thy journey from this world, O Christian soul,

In the name of God the Father Almighty who created thee;

In the name of Jesus Christ who suffered for thee;

In the name of the Holy Spirit who strengtheneth thee;

May thy portion this day be in peace,

and thy dwelling in the heavenly Jerusalem. Amen.”

Beautiful, comforting words, “May thy portion this day be in peace....” This spoke to me as I watched the service.

Perhaps because it related to our Gospel reading...When Jesus appeared to the frightened disciples and greeted them with words of peace...He said, *“Peace be with you!”* He could easily have said.... *May thy portion this day be in peace....*

Jesus' words are not just to make them feel better, as were the words of the Dean yesterday. But they are words with deep spiritual significance.

The word for peace in Hebrew is not simply the absence of strife, rather it speaks of something much deeper. It speaks of healing, well-being and wholeness.

What Jesus had in mind for the disciples was a well-being of body, mind and spirit for those traumatised disciples.

It's a word that we need today also.

We need a word of healing, a word that speaks of wholeness.

For the last year has been traumatic for us all as individuals and our world as a whole. Our world has been traumatised and we are still coming out of the shadows, just like the disciples in that upper room.

In the upper room, prior to Jesus appearing, what were the disciples doing? They were talking about Jesus v36 – While they were still talking about this...the appearance of Jesus to the two disciples on the Emmaus road.

This is significant for when we bring Jesus into our conversations and our fears, things begin to change. When we have the courage to speak about Jesus then he appears. Jesus said on an earlier occasion, where two or three are gathered in my name, there I will be.

Remember the paraphrase...

I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,

Or to defend his cause,

Maintain the honour of his Word,

The glory of his cross.

Then will he own my worthless name

Before his Father's face,

And in the new Jerusalem

Appoint my soul a place.

What I have admired about our Queen over the years and especially in the last decade is the way that she is not ashamed of her Christian faith – The way that she proclaims her beliefs openly to the nation – her Christmas addresses are always Christ-centred and I'm sure that yesterday's service for her husband would have given her great peace.

There is something powerful about believers joining together to speak about Jesus, whether that is face to face, as we are doing this morning or whether that is on Zoom – when Jesus' people speak about him – something happens - he will appear.

Not always in ways that we might imagine.

They weren't expecting Jesus to physically appear before them that day – were they?

But there he was, standing in their midst and saying to them, *shalom – peace be with you.*

He came not to chastise them for letting him down, nor for betraying him, nor for doubting him. He came to them as gentle as a dove, to bring healing and peace.

That is what our passage is about this morning.

It's about healing broken spirits and crushed people.

The psalmist wrote, three thousand years ago...

Why, my soul, are you downcast?

Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God

For I will yet praise him

My Saviour and my God

[Ps 42v11]

The psalmist was like the disciples downcast, depressed, discouraged, disturbed and he looks deep into his soul and he asks the question – *why am I like this?* Perhaps we have been there also, in moments of darkness and despair and we ask these same questions, *why Lord, am I like this?*

The Good news or the Gospel news – both words mean the same thing. The good news is that God still comes to those who are downcast and disturbed and he comes to bring his peace.

I hope that you are here this morning to receive the peace of God that passes human understanding.

Perhaps today in your soul, you may feel a bit like the disciples and the psalmist...downcast, disturbed, frightened, startled.

These are normal feelings especially in times of crisis. These are human feelings, and we all face them from time to time, but the good news is that we have one with us who also experienced those feelings, but who came through it and came back to tell us, so that we can have peace.

True peace is a gift from God.

Christ came to give us peace in our hearts. He is called the Prince of Peace.

What was troubling the disciples?

Many things, but I want to say three in particular and apply to our own hearts.

Firstly, the disciples were worried about their past.

Peace about the past – forgiveness

We are told that they were speaking about Jesus. It would have been an interesting conversation. Wouldn't we have liked to be a fly on the wall listening to them.

What were they speaking about?

Very likely the events surrounding the last few days of his life and then his death. This would have been fresh on their minds. There would be a good chance that they had many regrets, much guilt, and even blaming each other for their part in the Passion Story.

It is into this situation, that Jesus speaks *Shalom* – peace and wholeness.

This is good news. We have a God who cares about us so much that he has come to heal our past wounds. Our journey with Jesus begins with forgiveness. It begins with confession of our sins.

Why are you downcast? said the psalmist about his own soul, and when you look at the life of the greatest psalmist, David, you see every reason why he would be downcast. He also had fallen short of God. He had committed murder, he had committed adultery, he had failed and there was a time in his life when he languished in self-pity and these words very likely speak to his situation.

We can also take from these words that Jesus is here to bring healing to us. He is here to forgive our past, to deliver our souls from death. He is here to lift our spirits from the darkness of the past to the light of a new day.

This is what he is doing with the disciples. He is bringing *shalom* to them – healing of their past sins – how could they be his witnesses and go forward with the gospel and share his words of forgiveness, if they themselves did not receive Christ's healing and forgiveness. If they weren't lifted from the past and, in the words of the psalmist, have their feet placed on a firm rock.

This is the Gospel, that Christ has died for our sins and risen again and it begins when we meet with him and receive his *shalom*.

Have we received his *shalom*? Have we met with him in the place of discouragement, that place where our past has caught up with us and we

come to him with our confession and immediately as we do, we hear those words, *shalom*? You are healed, go in faith trusting me.

So, today, on this third resurrection morning of our Easter season, we receive afresh the risen Christ into our hearts and we receive his peace.

Peace about the present – his presence with us – The Holy Spirit

In receiving his *shalom*, the disciples were filled with his Spirit. But they first had to believe. They were sceptical. They needed to touch his wounds. Doubts were in their mind and so they have to experience the risen Christ and see that he was not a ghost but in fact he had bodily risen.

This would give them hope for the present. For the present reality is that they were hiding away for fear of persecution from the Jews and the Romans and they needed reassurance that this indeed was Christ. They needed their faith bolstered and so they had to experience Christ for themselves and it is no different for us also.

For being a Christian involves many things but at the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart and the ultimate question – have we met with the risen Christ – for if we have our faith will be on fire and nothing will stop us as Christians.

Our past will be healed and the present will be full of adventure and joy. Notice in our passage that after he shows them his hands and feet, real evidence of the crucifixion, real evidence that this is the suffering Messiah, notice that they are filled with joy and amazement. This is what characterises disciples of Jesus because something amazing and miraculous has happened – their Lord has triumphed over sin and death and he has returned and he will be with them on their life's journey and this is such an important point for us as Christians, we are not alone, Jesus is presently with us, his *shalom*, his peace, his spirit is in our hearts. He wishes us well. He breathes his spirit, his *shalom*, into our lives. This is what gives us

strength as Christians. It's this personal relationship with Christ on our earthly pilgrimage that makes all the difference.

Thirdly, that day as they received Christ's *shalom*. They became his witnesses. They became men and women on fire for Jesus to tell others of this great truth.

Peace about eternity – He gives us words of eternal life

One of the great arguments for the resurrection is that if it did not happen this small group of fearful individuals would have died, and there would be no followers of Jesus, no church. But something did happen, and that was that Christ's Spirit enabled them to become witnesses and to take his message to the world. He instructed them to wait until they are empowered from on high. As we know, after Jesus ascended into heaven comes Pentecost, the coming of his Spirit and the beginning of the church.

But as they were empowered, they now had a great message to share – a message that Jesus left with them as he opened their minds to the Scriptures. They would have reflected on his words and stories and actions and in 30 years or so afterwards, these stories were brought together and made into the four Gospels and in these stories would be Jesus' words about eternal life and in particular his teachings in the Gospel of John.

“Do not be troubled” he said... “Trust in God, trust also in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house, if it were not so, I would have told you.”

This would bring them great peace and *shalom* and healing and wholeness, that their past, their present and now their future have all been dealt with and that Jesus has given them his healing – his *shalom* - his peace upon their lives.

It really is a magnificent Gospel. I can think of no better way for us to live our lives, than to live them under the blessing of Jesus' *shalom* healing.

So, today if your soul is downcast, if you are struggling, come to him and receive afresh his *shalom* – receive his healing for the past, his strength for the present and his confidence for the future and with the psalmist say, *I will yet praise the Lord...*