

Zion, second Sunday of easter, 2021**Peace in a Time of Anxiety**

The disciples had locked themselves up inside their upper room. They had barricaded the door. Earlier that morning, they had heard some outrageous news from some of their women friends. The women had travelled to Jesus' grave. But when they got there, his tomb was empty! Peter & John ran to the tomb to check things out. They found it just as the women had said. Empty! As the day wore on, their anxiety grew & grew. So, they sheltered together to avoid danger. They were afraid. They set themselves apart from fear of danger. The same is true for us. We're fearful of the things that might harm us. We're afraid of what this pandemic means for us economically. Business owners fret over the fate of their companies. Workers fear they may lose their jobs. People who already are unemployed wonder how they will make ends meet. There's no lack of anxiety these days. Stress is on the rise. So, we can definitely relate to the disciples and their fear. We get it!

But then the risen Jesus breaks in through their locked door. He enters their anxiety-filled room and, of all things, he says, "Peace be with you!" Into their fears, Jesus – the risen Jesus – brings peace. And he doesn't bring just any old peace. He brings his peace. For he is peace. His very presence is the source of their peace.

A man by the name of Horatio Gates Spafford was born in New York, on the 20th. of October 1828. He was a friend of the world famous evangelist Dwight L. Moody. Horatio and his wife Anna had four daughters. In 1873, Spafford decided his family should take a holiday in England. He knew that Moody, his evangelist friend, would be preaching there in the autumn. Horatio was delayed because of business, so he sent his family ahead: his wife and their four children, all daughters, 11 year old Anna, 9 year old Margaret Lee, 5 year old Elizabeth, and 2 year old Tanetta.

On the 22nd. of November 1873, while crossing the Atlantic by steamship, their vessel was struck by an iron sailing ship. His wife was spared but all four of his daughters perished. He set off at once to be reunited with his wife. One day, during the voyage, the captain summoned him to the bridge of the vessel. Pointing to his charts, he explained that they were then passing over the very spot where the ship carrying his family had sunk. It is said that right there and right then, Spafford returned to his cabin and wrote the hymn "It is well with my soul":

**When Peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.**

**Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blessed assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.**

**My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!**

**And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.**

For Horatio Spafford, Jesus was His peace. How about you? Is He your peace? For the disciples, Jesus was their peace. When they were in his presence, their anxiety melted away. His presence was peace.

Anxiety can breed anxiety. When you walk into a situation where people are tense, you naturally tense up, too. But the opposite is also true. One person can walk into a tense situation & restore peace and calm to everyone there. Their peace spreads to everyone else. Peace begets peace. And a single peaceful presence can allay our fears. With their peaceful presence, they convey a sense that things will work out all right.

Jesus is the paramount non-anxious presence! And why? First of all, he's the author of life. He's the Word made flesh! All things have come into being through him. And without him, nothing could exist. Jesus is the word of God. He's the Alpha and the Omega. He's the beginning and the end.

And secondly, his presence is peace because he's been through it all! He's been there and done it. He has experienced utter rejection, even by his closest peers. He's been condemned and cursed. He's been whipped and chastised. He's been taunted & tortured. He has carried the weight of all the world's sin and woe.

As the prophet Isaiah said, **Surely he has borne our griefs & carried our sorrows.** Jesus underwent an agonizing death on a cross. His deceased body was laid in its grave. But then he overcame even death. Jesus is peace because he's literally been to Hell and back. He's walked victorious out of the grave. There is nothing that he hasn't overcome. It's this Jesus who enters into the midst of his disciples! This is the Jesus who says, "Peace be with you." And when Jesus gives you peace, you have the peace that passes all human understanding!

Our risen Lord Jesus Christ spreads his peace upon us in our own anxious times. His new life is our new life. His victory is our victory. And his peace is our peace. In his peace, we cast our anxieties upon him.

During these times of increased anxiety, we can dwell in Christ's peace. We can pass that peace along to others. I'd like to suggest three things:

NUMBER ONE: Be present in the now. Anxiety carries with it the dread of an unknown future. But peace exists in the here and now. So be fully aware of the present moment.

Remember, this is the day the Lord has made! God's blessings come to us today. They come in the present tense. In the here and now, you will see signs of God. Look for those God moments as they unfold before your very eyes. Peace is found where God is near. Dwell in the present.

NUMBER TWO: when you find yourself filled with tension,

acknowledge it. As you live with the fear, remember our Lord who has promised to be with us to the end of times. The one who has conquered all things is near. Even as we walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, we know that he is with us. Through the peace of Christ, we can acknowledge and face our anxieties.

NUMBER THREE: when we are embraced in the peace of Christ, his

peace lives in us. We become ambassadors of his peace in an anxious world. Jesus tells his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When you lack peace in your life, I encourage you to remember these things. They are God's Cures/Remedies for...

* Worry: John 14:1, "**Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me...**"

* A broken heart: Psalms 34:18: "**The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.**"

* Fear: 2 Timothy 1:7, "**For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.**"

* Doubt: Proverbs 3:5-6, **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your path."**

* Loneliness: Matt. 28:20, **"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

* Hurt: Isaiah 53:4-5, **"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."** * Sin: 1 John 1:9, **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."**

* Lost Soul: John 3:16, **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."**

The peace of Jesus wants to set up residence within us. He wants to break into our barricaded lives. His presence takes away our fears. He fills us with his resurrection life. Living in his hope and peace, we bring that peace with us wherever we go.

There's someone out there whose quavering heart can be stilled by the peace of Christ. There's someone like Thomas, someone who's self-isolating in despair. Their strength can be renewed by the encouraging word of hope. They don't have to walk alone, for you are with them! And the peace of the risen Christ is with us. May the peace of Christ be with you and fill you with hope for the future.

According to the Bureau of Standards in Washington, D.C., a dense fog covering seven city blocks to a height of 100 feet is composed of less than one glass of water. That amount of water is divided into about 60 billion tiny droplets. Yet when those minute particles settle over a city or the countryside, they can almost blot out everything from your sight. Many people as well as those people that call themselves Christian live their lives in a fog. They allow a cupful of troubles to cloud their vision and dampen their spirit. Anxiety, turmoil and defeat strangle their thoughts.

This question was once asked, "If you could choose what you want most in life, what would you ask for?" The most common answer was "Peace." People want peace in their marriages, families, workplaces, country and world. Our country has some of the best medical and psychological treatment centers, highest educational institutions and worldwide communication abilities. Yet with all of these things, most people are yet without true inner peace. The results are devastating... broken marriages,

split families, hatred, rebellion, financial anxiety, a country unsettled. The world will offer you peace through many forms of escapism... drugs, alcohol, immoral relationships, constant entertainment. It is sought through all forms of pleasure, self-satisfaction and positive thinking. Many believe that peace is defined as the absence of trouble. They refuse to face the problems in their lives believing that this is finding peace. The world, however, has never held the answer to true peace.

You can choose to have true peace. True peace comes not from man but from God. This peace means to be in harmony with God, to be bound, joined and woven together with God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It also means to be assured of, confident of and secure in the love and care of God. There is a consciousness and a sure trust that God will provide, guide, strengthen, sustain, encourage, deliver and save completely those who seek Him with all their hearts. This supernatural peace comes first and foremost from receiving Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord. Second, it comes from a knowledge of God's Word.

The Apostle Paul knew this peace. He suffered greatly because of his love for the Lord, love for God's truth and because of his commitment to the commission given to him by Jesus Christ. Yet in all this, his heart was kept in perfect peace.

He had been imprisoned, stoned, left for dead and scourged by the Romans, and yet he said in Romans 8:28, "**And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.**" Note the conditions of knowing God's peace that Paul presents here:

1.) You must love God, and

2.) you must be called according to His purpose, which means fitting into His plan and into His perfect will for your life.

Most reject God's peace because they surrender to their own selfishness and their lust for the pleasures of this world. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you." A legacy of inner peace is offered to all who know Jesus Christ, regardless of their circumstances.

In these days of uncertainty and distress, will you receive Jesus Christ into your life? He is the Giver of eternal life and the Prince of Peace!

Peace with God brings the peace of God. It is a peace that settles our nerves. It is a peace that fills our mind. It is a peace that floods our spirit. It's a peace in the midst of the uproar around us. A peace that gives us the assurance that everything is all right. When we give our hearts to Christ in salvation, we experience "peace with God" but the "peace of God" takes us a step farther into God's blessings. This does not mean the absence of trials

on the outside, but it does mean a quiet confidence within, regardless of circumstances, people or things.

An important step to having peace with God is simply recognizing that God is God and we are not. That God is holy, and we are not.