

Peace Be With You

John 20: 19-31

As I reflect on the scriptures this week, the world is torn apart in another senseless act of violence with the bombings in Brussels. Everyone is worried. We are all on high-alert. There has been another teenager die in Cedar Rapids, IA due to gun violence, and our country seems to be divided into camps of hatred. Two thousand years after Jesus uttered the words, **“Peace be with you”** to his disciples, hiding in the upper room, I wonder if we have grasped the real meaning of this gift of peace? If we are to be believers in Jesus, then certainly we are called to embrace this gift of peace, living it out in our own lives. This, however, is not an easy or simple task in my personal experience.

Biblically, peace is understood as **“a right relationship with God, which entails forgiveness, reconciliation, and union.”*** This is the gift Jesus offers us this week in the gospel of John. Jesus’ own death was an act of violent oppression designed to suppress his message of hope, love and peace. In the aftermath of this violent death, Jesus does not return to his disciples with a message of violent revenge but with a message of forgiveness and charity.

We then sit on the cusp of challenge and the need to change. If we call ourselves believers then what are we to believe? What are we looking for in a Savior? Are we looking for a military hero who will destroy the enemy? Are we any different than those who sat in fear in the upper room on that first evening or that first week after the resurrection? Do we believe that there is a divine answer to the problems and conflicts of this world?

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you. And when he said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them and whose sins you retain are retained.” Jesus breathed on these first disciples the same breath that God breathed into Adam. Yet this is something all-together new. Jesus has changed what it means to be human.. At our baptism, we are told that **“we are a new creation, we have put on Christ, in him we are reborn.”**

This new life, in the Spirit, calls us to embrace the discipline of peace which includes the need to be in right relationship with God and others. We are called to forgive the most difficult and violent acts with the same mercy as Jesus, We are to seek reconciliation and union with those who have violated our most sacred values, being prophets of virtue and holiness. This is the very essence of why it is so hard to be a Christian. And yet, it is our baptismal call to continue in Jesus’ example of justice, mercy and love.

Thomas expresses the joy and magnitude of true belief when he utters, **“My Lord and my God.”** This mission of hope and peace is not a human activity, but rather, it is a divine mission in which we are to take part. It is through the Holy Spirit that we can believe. As the gospel writer says today, **“these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.”**

Happy Easter! Peace be with you!


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*The New Dictionary of Theology (TNDT)