

Pastor T.C. Arnold
2nd Sunday of Easter
John 20:19-31
April 24, 2022 (Farewell)

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you."

Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

Three times Jesus speaks these very important words. Three times... a reminder of the trinity. Three times, which culturally for the Jews meant a complete peace. Three times Jesus speaks peace as a blessing for His disciples. And even today, Jesus speaks this blessing to you.

When Jesus tell you, "*peace be with you*," God's peace is placed directly upon your heart. God blesses you. Blessings are important. A blessing is a "Gospel enactment." In other words, God enacts His Gospel word and promise and gives it to you. This means that God gives you something that is His and places it upon your heart. It belongs to you. It's as if God speaks the Gospel promise directly into your life. When the words are spoken... you have what they say. God's peace belongs to you.

In the text, Jesus arrives, and then blesses. He arrives, and gives peace. In church, we know that we receive the blessing at the end of our time together. We "end" with God's blessing. But did you know that there are six other times during the Divine Service where God shares His blessing for you. I'll name them.

First it comes at the very beginning of the Service. His name is spoken and the sign of the cross is made. God places His name on you and we begin the Service in that name – the same name that was placed on you at your Baptism. It's a baptismal beginning.

The second time is right before collect. We hear the Lord's blessing, "The Lord be with you." We respond, "And with thy Spirit." It is spoken again that the Lord is with you, blessing you, and granting you peace in His name.

Third is when the sermon begins. "*Grace, mercy and 'PEACE' be to you from God our father.*" This is the way Paul began his sermons we know as the Epistles. His peace introduces each sermon. Notice that this blessing again puts God's peace right into your life.

Fourth is the conclusion of the sermon. "*The peace of God which passes all understanding...*" It shouldn't surprise us, God delivers for us another blessing with His peace at the very center.

Fifth is the blessing we hear before Holy Communion. They are these words, "*The peace of the Lord be with you always.*" The congregation responds to this "peace" again with a resounding "Amen." Another time that a blessing is delivered... with this word, "peace." I think you see a pattern emerging.

Sixth is the blessing that comes after you commune. Mostly we say, "Peace be with you, depart in peace." Another way the liturgy shares with us to say this very same blessing is to say, "The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bless and keep you always in the one true faith unto life everlasting, go in peace."

Seventh is the blessing at the end of the Service we call the benediction. "*The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance on you and give you PEACE.*" It shouldn't surprise you that Jesus begins His blessings and ends His blessings with PEACE.

Jesus says in John 14, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*" Jesus' peace is something special. It comes no matter what. It comes when hearts are discouraged and when life gets you down. It comes when work becomes frustrating or when yet another family matter has ruined special plans. God's peace has a way of coming... being placed upon our lives... amid life's greatest storms. When fears leave us

wondering what's next, when divisions rend loved ones apart, and when war, viruses, and all of life's worries makes headlines, the peace of Jesus is still with us.

I should remind you again; our worship is really the Lord's Service to us. This is why it's called the Divine Service. In it, God delivers seven different blessings upon you. God's blessings deliver peace to Christians amid a complicated and trouble-laden world. Remember Jesus said, "*I do not give to you as the world gives.*" The world has a different idea of peace. We are not promised worldly peace. We are promised God's peace and He delivers it to you. And this kind of peace is yours, no matter how you feel.

I guess there are two ways someone can feel at a farewell. A person might feel happy with relief: "Finally! I thought they would never leave." Or, sad with a little fear about what's next, or how we will go forward from here. There may be a little of both regarding today's farewell in church today. I smile when I say that. But really, we know how farewells make us feel. And honestly, I don't want to dwell on the fact that this is a "farewell" sermon... for a couple of reasons.

First, and most obvious. This is not my last sermon. I don't know if you know this, but I'm coming back on Mother's Day because we have our youth confirmation that day. Like a bad penny, I keep coming back (don't forget, I once preached a farewell sermon from this very place in 2004 and look what you have to deal with again).

But second, because this sermon, this church, the ministry that has occurred in Parkville and Platte Woods for 65 blessed years, has never been about Arnold. It's not about Froiland. It wasn't about Krueger or any other pastor who served here. This was never Arnold's church. It was never Krueger's church. How much some would have us to believe it, this church never has belonged to any pastor that preaches from this pulpit. It's always been, and forever will be, Christ's Church. This church belongs to the Lord. And that is very good news. Here's why.

It means that He's in charge. And we can be confident that He will remain in charge of His church. This means that God will continue to forgive sins in this place. That God will continue to lead His people to salvation from this altar. That means that God will continue to raise up servants to share the Good News of Jesus.

It means His loves endures. We know things change. That's what life does. It sometimes changes quickly. But we hear this promise that comes from His Word: "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.*" That promise endures. His loves endures. And that's what we can always count on. Things around the church change. The building changes. The way we carry out the ministry changes. Our Pre-K has changed. Children are born, grow up... they change. Church members come and go sometimes – they change. Sometimes pastors change too.

But there is one constant and that is what we can count on. Jesus... is the same yesterday, today and forever. And, beloved, as long as we have that, we have everything we need.

God will send His peace. He arrives in our midst every time we have the Divine Service and says, "Peace be with you." I described earlier every blessed time He does so for us today and the three times He does so for the disciples in the text. He reminds us that His peace is not the world's peace. It's better. It's better because it transcends the bad in our lives, the worry, and the fears. His peace pierces into our soul and reminds us that God brings us something that is not of this world. His blood transcends our fears and grants us an eternal bliss that cannot be comprehended on this side of eternity. That's Good News.

Beloved, this is not goodbye (and I don't say that because I'm coming back in May to preach at confirmation). This is, until we meet again. God's strength is yours. God's love endures. And God's peace will continue to pass our understanding. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.