

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourth Sunday After Easter, May 15, 2022

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 208: 1-4, 207: 6, 375, 210, 207: 1-2.

Lessons: Isaiah 12: 1-6, 1 Corinthians 15: 1-20, John 20: 19-25.

Text: Luke 24: 33-49

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How do you get something you want? Perhaps as a child you ask for it and hope that someone will give it to you. As an adult, you expect that you will have to work for it. Sometimes even adults hope that someone will give us something, but that is usually not the case – when it comes to earthly things. But there is one thing that really is free. It is a tremendously valuable spiritual gift that God gives to us. That is “grace”. Christianity, true Christianity is the only religion that is really a religion of grace. All other religions expect man to do something to earn the favor of a supreme being.

Grace? What does that word mean? It means God’s undeserved goodness and mercy, his undeserved love. God freely gives his undeserved love and mercy, which provides free forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation for all people, as we learn from the catechism.

So how does God go about giving this gift? We also speak of the “means of grace” as those means, or ways, or “methods” God uses to deliver his grace to us.

By what means do we learn to know the grace of God? It is by the study of God’s Word. So we say that the Means by which God makes known and gives his grace to us is his Word. Now the two chief teachings in the Bible – the Word of God – are the Law and the Gospel. Because the Law in the Word of God has as one of its chief purposes or use for all humans, believers and unbelievers alike, to show us our sinfulness, the Law of God in his Word cannot show us his grace. So it is only the Gospel in the Word of God that shows the love of God. And we learn that God delivers his gospel, his grace through the Word and the sacraments.

I suppose that God, because he is all-powerful and all-knowing could have chosen any way at all to deliver his grace to us. He could have chosen to give us his grace in the water we use for drinking and washing, as we drink and wash every day. But he didn’t. He used his Word in the sacrament of Baptism, applied only once in a person’s life. But is it the water which delivers God’s Grace to us? From Luther’s Small Catechism we learned: *It is certainly not the water that does such things, [as forgiving our sins, delivering us from death and the devil, and giving us eternal salvation] but God's Word which is in and with the water, and faith which trusts this Word used with the water.*

For without God's Word the water is just plain water and not Baptism. But with the Word it is Baptism. God's Word makes it a washing through which God graciously forgives our sin and grants us rebirth and a new life through the Holy Spirit.

I suppose that God could have chosen to give us his grace in bread that we eat every day. But he chose his Word. In the Lord’s Supper, the sacrament of Holy Communion, we learned, *“What is the Sacrament of Holy Communion? It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ for us Christians to eat and to drink.”* And,

“It is certainly not the eating and drinking that does such things, but the Words ‘given’ and ‘poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.’ These Words are the main thing in this sacrament, along with the eating and drinking. And whoever believes these Words has what they plainly say, the forgiveness of sins.”

That message is delivered to us through words, the kind of words Jesus spoke in our sermon text.

JESUS APPEARS AND GIVES HIS DISCIPLES A MESSAGE OF PEACE

1. They were in need of peace – peace with God.
2. Jesus brings a message of peace with his Words.

They were gathered that evening behind locked doors. After all, they had seen what the Jewish leaders had done to Jesus, and with Jesus' body missing from the grave, they worried that those same Jews would turn against them. For one thing, the leaders of the Jews were worried about Jesus' disciples stealing his body and claiming he rose from the dead. They just didn't feel safe.

But the locked doors could not keep Jesus out. We don't know much about Jesus' resurrected body – except that it was a glorified body, but we know he left a sealed tomb with even the grave cloths still intact and neatly folded, not as they had been used to wrap his dead body – in the tomb – and that he bodily appeared inside a locked room. Jesus himself appeared in their midst, and he gives them the greeting of “peace be with you.” It is words they all need to hear, for they are understandably filled with fear.

The disciples reacted in their fear as if they were seeing a ghost. Jesus first wants to convince his disciples they are not seeing a ghost or a spirit but a real, live person. His resurrected body still bore the marks of the nails and the spear at the crucifixion, to which Jesus pointed to erase their doubts. He shows them his hands and feet still marked with the wounds he suffered. He invites them to touch him to demonstrate that he has flesh and blood and is no ghost. Finally he eats a piece of broiled fish before their doubting eyes. There is a great struggle going on in their hearts between the joy of believing and the dread of being deceived. In the same way, Satan tempts us so that faith struggles with doubt in the Christian's heart.

Jesus calls out to the disciples with the typical Hebrew greeting: “Peace be with you!” But here and now, coming from the lips of the risen Savior, it was much more than a casual wish. He brought them the peace that would sustain them through all earthly troubles.

Every disciple, even today, can still read and apply this greeting personally. Jesus also says to us, “Peace be with you!”

That peace is delivered to us thru the means of Grace which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it is delivered to you in the Word and in the Sacraments. The Jesus who had been with many of these disciples for three years, the Jesus whom they had seen executed on a cross, who had been buried was now alive and in their midst and he was giving them peace. He is the same person, and his message is the same. Jesus reminds them of how his entire ministry is a fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. One writer observed that the first public sermon preached by Jesus as recorded in Luke's Gospel began with this statement: ***“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*** Luke 4:21 (NIV) On this evening Jesus moves through the various books of the Old Testament opening the minds of his disciples to show how all has been fulfilled in himself. The Old Testament is promise, and the New Testament is fulfillment. But the message is the same: repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus not only shows himself to be a living person, but he also opens their minds to an understanding of the Scriptures. ***“He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’”*** Luke 24:46-49 (NIV)

The women had seen him. However, it is obvious that the disciples remained skeptical. Yet he himself appears in their midst and speaks the Words of God to them, explaining how everything that had been written in the scriptures had to be fulfilled in him.

He knew, of course, that he would be leaving them to go to be with the Father. But they didn't know just how soon that would be – just 40 days after his resurrection, 40 days from this day he is talking to them, from the events in our sermon text. Jesus knew the urgency of teaching them what it was all about. They still didn't quite understand it all yet on this evening, and didn't even understand it just before he ascended into heaven. Jesus Christ surely felt the urgency of getting some more things done on earth before he ascended into heaven, even though his work of redemption was done.

He, of course, was God's Son, and knew all things, particularly in his glorified state. But can you imagine the sense of need, of urgency that he must have felt when he knew there were only a few days left that he would be physically with them on earth?

Today we do not have the privilege of seeing the body of our risen Lord face to face; but we have the Old and New Testament Scriptures which bear witness to him. These are sufficient for our faith and our witness. Everything we need to know is revealed in the Word of God. We need only to hear and read it to be assured of peace. Not, as you will read in the notes after the end of this sermon, earthly peace, but peace with God. Peace is knowing that God is not angry with you because of your sins but forgives them for Jesus' sake, because of what Jesus did. That peace is yours today. Turn from your sins and repent! Jesus paid for your sins and you do not have to suffer eternally for them. Believe this and share in the message Jesus gave to those gathered on the evening of the day he rose from the dead.

“Blessed are they that have not seen
And yet whose faith hath constant been,
In life eternal they shall reign: Alleluia!” Amen.
(The Lutheran Hymnal 208:8)

PEACE

(Numbers 6:22-27 KJV) *“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.”*

In this Aaronic Blessing, which we hear at the end of most of our worship services, we hear the Words *“The Lord ... give thee peace”*.

Peace! That's what brought Christ down from a throne of glory to a cross of shame. Peace! That's what Christ has prepared for all people. No, not peace as the world understands it. Not an end to rocket rattlings and nuclear threats. Not an end to racial tension and relatives' bickerings. Not an end to cold-blooded killings in the street or more sanitary murders of the unborn in the womb. Not an end to hostilities in Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, Palestine, and a million or so places in the world. Such outward peace could indeed come if everyone had God's true peace in his or her heart.

When the Lord promises peace, he means the real thing – peace with him. He means the peace I have when I see God's face turned toward me in love instead of away from me in hate, anger with my sins, and disgust with my Words, thoughts, and actions. The peace I have when I see his love smiling on me and forgiving my sins in Christ. The peace I have when I know and believe that he is my loving Father who guides me every stumbling step I take as his child. The peace I have when I know and believe that when I step out of this life, he will take me to heaven. The peace I have because my sins are forgiven because of what Jesus did.

Every believer is the work of the Holy Spirit. So am I. As Martin Luther confessed, *“He has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”* When the Spirit brings me to faith, he gives me the peace I need in life and death. I hear of that peace every time I hear the Gospel!

(Adapted from Together with Jesus, a daily devotion book by Richard E. Lauersdorf, NPH, 2003)

(Entire sermon and devotion on Peace adapted from a Ministry By Mail sermon for the Fourth Sunday After Easter, 2007.)