

Happy Easter to All Nations



On the evening of that first day of the week

Jesus said to His disciples:

“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

This Easter is like none we have ever known before, as a fallen world awakens to a reminder of man’s weakness and fragility. Never in recent history has a focus on mortality been the headline news for so long. Day after day, we are informed of the impact Covid 19 is having upon every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.

Governments the world over, scientists, leading experts and doctors strive to save us from disease, note the word has two parts i.e. *dis* + *ease*.

There has been a tremendous humanitarian outpouring for the welfare of the nations and we’ve witnessed testimonies of man’s best qualities and self-sacrifice to serve one another. The counsel and advice given by the World Health Organisation and National leaders may be saving us from physical harm but there remains a sense of dis-ease throughout the world.

Some are beginning to ask why, how, what does this all mean and what should we do to do to be saved? As Jonny Nash sung in the seventies: “There are more questions than answers”!

However, as spiritual eyes begin to open, we (the church) must be ready to receive those who come to ask and seek the truth. So how can we answer those who do ask, seek and knock on the door of the church? What truth and hope do Christians hold in the risen Lord?

These are vital questions with eternal consequences that are rarely, if ever posed by the news media outlets. However, I do sense they will be asked more in the coming weeks and months, as the inevitability of death awakens man’s innermost fear.

Are we prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks and to give a reason for the hope that we have, with gentleness and respect?

Let’s read from the Gospel of John 20:19-21 to see how:

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Let me ask you if you have you ever been woken from a deep sleep in the middle of the night? Perhaps an alarm going off startled you or someone knocking at the door interrupted a sweet dream; Maybe it was a phone ringing in the dead of night and you woke up to fear the worst?

How disturbing it is when a sudden and unexpected commotion wakes us up from a warm and comfortable place. And as we come to our senses, how does that make us feel: are we shocked, confused, do we rise up out of bed to see what's going on or do we turn over and go back to sleep?

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus in chapter 5 verse 14 asking the Ephesians to make the most of every opportunity, saying:

... "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

My sense today is that recent events have shaken many out of a deep sleep. I may be speaking just for myself but the reality of what has happened must surely test all people of faith, I confess it tests mine!

Therefore, how do we respond to this sudden pandemic, do we rise up or should we 'metaphorically' roll over and go back to sleep?

How did the disciples feel when they had their world shaken by the death of Jesus? What did they do in the days, months and years following His crucifixion? And more importantly, how did they respond to His command "to be sent"?

Let's look a little closer at our scripture in the Gospel of John and trust it will help us understand how we might respond to what Jesus asks of us.

I would like to highlight 3 truths from these verses to encourage you this Easter and I pray the very words of Jesus would open our spiritual eyes and awaken his body at the break of this new day.

1st Jesus will stand with those in fear and offer them peace (vs. 19);

2nd Jesus will show the wounds by which we are healed and bring great joy in that He has overcome death (vs. 20);

3rd Jesus will again offer peace as He sends those who follow Him (vs. 21).

The first point we see is that Jesus will stand with those in fear and offer them peace

It's not unusual for fear to rise up when circumstances suddenly change, notice how the disciples were in fear. They locked themselves away fearing those who had crucified their Messiah, perhaps they feared they would be next!

Very often our plans don't go as we expect them to and we're suddenly faced with a life-threatening situation. Notice how Jesus stood with His disciples and offered them peace in theirs.

Just a few days earlier Jesus had said: *"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"*.

Comforting words and much needed, as the disciples were in lockdown, fearing the worst!

May I encourage you this morning that Jesus understands the position you are in and will stand with you wherever you are, offering you peace in a time of fear and separation.

The second point we see is that Jesus will show you the wounds by which you are healed and bring you great joy in that He has overcome death

After Jesus greeted his disciples, he showed them the wounds he bore on the cross, perhaps to prove it was him who stood in their midst.

Perhaps he wanted them to remember what he had done to save a fallen world and that everything he had said to them was in fact true.

Perhaps it was to confirm his mission the Father had sent him on, to be the *perfect* sacrifice to reconcile imperfect man and bring him back into relationship with a *perfect* God.

Perhaps it was all of the above?

Whichever it was, the man-made wounds left by crucifixion demonstrated the price which had to be paid to redeem sinful man from the curse; his wounds revealed the grace of God and the depth of his love for those who turn from their old life and come to him.

All who call upon his name will be saved.

Have you made that confession yet and agreed with God that you need a Saviour?

If you have, then the revelation of God's love and what it cost him to save sinful man from death and judgement, fills you and I, like the disciples, with an inexpressible joy.

In the words of an old hymn:

*Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy:
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.*

May I encourage you this morning that putting your faith in the risen Lord Jesus will fill your heart with bliss, great joy at the break of this new day.

The third point we see is that Jesus will again offer peace as He sends those who follow Him to be a witness.

The 3rd point this morning really is the application following the previous two.

If we were to read all 4 gospels, we would see that in Matthew 28:19 *Jesus said ...to make disciples of all nations...*;

In Mark 16:15 Jesus said ... *'go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation...;*

And in Luke 24:44, 47 Jesus said this is what is written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms...*repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations,...*

The thought of obeying these commands may cause fear to rise in our heart but remember Jesus offers peace as we follow his example 'in being sent'. Remember, he promised to be with us always, even to the end of this age.

The encouragement to followers of Jesus this morning is not to let this lockdown cause fear but to take courage when he said:

“ For where two or three gather together in My name, there am I with them.”

Be encouraged therefore, and let his word fill your heart with great Joy as we take every opportunity and prepare to gather again ‘soon and very soon’, God willing, by Pentecost!

Billy Graham said:

“We are the Bibles the world is reading;
We are the creeds the world is needing;
We are the sermons the world is heeding.”

Let me remind you of Paul’s counsel to:

...*“Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”*

How will you respond to the risen Lord Jesus this morning?

Have a blessed Easter to All Nations



Amen