

Goal: That the hearers would be live the peace that the risen Christ gives.

A very wealthy man commissioned an artist to paint something that would depict true peace. The artist painted a beautiful, tranquil beach. The sun was shining with a few soft fluffy white clouds in the sky. There was a hammock hanging between two palm trees and the waves were gently rolling onto the beach. The artist gave to the man, but there was a look of disappointment on his face. *“This isn’t true peace. Try again.”* The artist went back to his studio and began to paint a beautiful young mother, holding a sleeping child, smiling lovingly at her. *“Surely this is true peace,”* and gave it to the man. But again, the wealthy man refused the painting and asked the painter to try again.

The artist was discouraged, he was tired, he was disappointed, he was angry. He thought and prayed for inspiration to picture true peace. Then, he had an idea. He rushed to the canvas and began to paint furiously. When he finished, he gave it to the wealthy man. The man studied it carefully, *“Now this is true peace”* and he paid the artist. What was this picture? It was a picture of a stormy sea pounding against a cliff. The artist had captured the fury of the wind as it whipped black rain clouds laced with streaks of lightning. The sea was roaring, waves were churning, and the sky was dark and filled with a furious thunderstorm. And in the middle of the picture, under a cliff, snuggled safely in the rocks, was a small bird, safe and dry in her nest. The bird had peace amidst the storm that raged all about her.

Jesus came to the disciples amidst the confusion and chaos of the resurrection and said, (***“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” (John 20: 19)***) Now, this wasn’t just some casual greeting like, *“what’s up”* or *“how you doing?”* Jesus’ words are much deeper than that.

Consider the situation. The disciples were crowded into a room with the doors locked. They had fled and hid when Jesus was arrested. Now, they heard that Jesus’ body was no longer in the tomb and that He had arisen, but they couldn’t believe it. Then again, what if it was true? If Jesus was alive what might He say to them? *“You’re fired! And I’m starting over with another twelve.”* That’d be appropriate, right? Or He’d punish them in some way so that they learned my lesson. *“Drop and give me twenty.”* But Jesus doesn’t do any of that. He simply appears in their midst and says, ***“Peace be with you.”***

There’s only one way for sinners to be at peace with God, and that is if their sins are taken away. Because Jesus died on the cross, their sins were taken away. So, this is more than just a greeting from the risen Lord. It’s an absolution as Jesus tells them their sins are forgiven. Note that Jesus doesn’t say, *“If you believe in Me, I have peace for you.”* He just says, *“Peace be with you.”* Forgiveness doesn’t follow faith. Faith follows forgiveness. And the result is peace.

Along with peace, He shows them the proof; His hands and His side. (***“When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.” (John 20: 20)***) It’s not that Jesus couldn’t be fully healed. He

preserves the marks of His wounds to prove that it's Him, and to prove God's love that His sacrifice has been made for your sins. These marks are His proof of love and forgiveness for you.

“Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.” Can you imagine their joy? Jesus stands right there before them. He forgives them. He restores them. He affirms God's love by proving that death can't separate them from Him. They have peace. Like a big breath of air being released from the lungs. A peace that relived their grief, calmed their fears, and filled them with the joy of the resurrection.

And with that peace, comes a purpose, of bringing peace to others. ***Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” (John 20: 21 – 23)*** The peace of Easter was not only for the disciples but for all who are struggling and living in fear.

As your pastor, this is my calling, my responsibility, to speak Christ's peace to you. The essential role of a pastor, is not to preach inspirational sermons or master technology or to chant the liturgy perfectly or author books. The primary role of a pastor is to speak God's forgiveness through the redeeming blood of Jesus, to bring peace to the troubled soul. We call it the Office of the Keys, the authority to forgive and retain sins.

There's a story of a king who ruled over a rebellious kingdom. He was a just king; but for whatever reason, troublemakers spread news that he was unjust and caused many to rebel. The more the king tried to arrest and punish the rebels, the more unjust they accused him of being. Fear reigned and opposition grew. One day, the king issued a decree of pardon, whatever crimes of rebellion the people had committed, he would not hold against them. They could come out of the shadows and return to their homes. They could go back to their daily lives as law-abiding citizens without fear.

To make the pardon known, the king sent out his heralds to each town square, declaring, *“The king says, ‘I pardon you of all your crimes! Go back to your lives.’”* If someone were to ask, *“Who are you to pardon crimes?”*, the herald would say, *“I'm nobody. I'm just telling you what the king says.”* The word spread and soon it wasn't just the heralds telling the news, neighbors were telling of it, friends discussed it over coffee. It was spread at the water cooler and at soccer games. Many heard and believed the pardon, and went back to their lives as free citizens. But others didn't, thinking the king was a liar, so they continued to remain rebels because they disbelieved.

This is the mission of the church and how the Office of the Keys works. Christ the King has declared a pardon, forgiveness of all sins, purchased by His blood. He has sent out His heralds to announce the pardon. He does this in the absolution at the start of the service. *“Upon this, your confession, I, by virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you.”* It doesn't get much

simpler than that. Then the absolution goes on, *“And in the stead and by the command of My Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all of your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”* In other words, I’m here to tell you what Jesus would say if He were standing here. He would say to you who have just confessed your sins and asked for forgiveness, *“Peace be with you. See marks in my hands and side. See the place where I placed my name upon you and gave you eternal life.”*

Does that mean that the pastor has some special power to forgive sins? No. I’m called into this office as the herald had the authority to do so on behalf of the king. But what happened next in the story? The people who heard told their friends and neighbors. That’s you, that’s what you do. You remind your kids and your spouse and your folks that they’re pardoned. You tell your friends and others who ask you about your faith. When a three-year-old gets back from a keiki message and whispers Jesus died on the cross to take away your sins, he’s spreading the news of the pardon too. Witnessing is not some graduate level task for a few professionals, it’s people who have heard they are forgiven in Christ who then tell other people that they are forgiven in Christ.

Many believe the news that they are forgiven and they live their lives as His forgiven people. Many don’t believe the news, thinking God can’t be merciful or that Jesus didn’t die for them or they just like their rebellion too much that they twist the pardon to fit their means. If so, they remain condemned because they don’t believe He pardoned them.

Remember, it’s called the Office of the Keys, not key. To all who believe the news of the pardon and repent of their sins, the gates of heaven are unlocked and we’re overjoyed to tell them. To those who won’t repent of their sin, we need to tell them that the gates of heaven are still locked, not because Jesus hasn’t pardoned them, but because they’ve rejected the pardon and choose to live in their rebellion. So, we warn them out of concern for their souls. After all, that’s why Jesus died and rose again, for them and for you. That’s what the Bible is all about. That’s the message Christ’s Church is to proclaim throughout the ages until the Lord returns. ***“Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20: 29 – 31)***

Have you ever felt overwhelmed by life and fear that everything is just out of control? Everyone has. Then look to the cross and look to the font as I speak God’s Word of pardon and peace to you. You are forgiven all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you. And when you leave today, at peace, go and share that same word of forgiveness with others. In Jesus name. Amen.