

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

An artist was commissioned by a wealthy man to paint something that would depict peace. After a great deal of thought, the artist painted a beautiful country scene. There were green fields with cows, a blue sky with birds flying, and a little village off in a distant valley. The artist gave the picture to the man, but there was a look of disappointment on his face. *“This isn’t a picture of true peace. Go try again.”*

The artist went back to his studio, thought about peace again for several hours then began to paint. When he was finished, there on the canvas was a beautiful picture of a mother, holding a sleeping baby, smiling lovingly at the child. He thought, this is surely true peace, and hurried to give the picture to the wealthy 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, and he was angry. Again, he thought, even prayed for inspiration to paint a picture of true peace. Then, an idea came, he rushed to the canvas and began to paint as he had never painted before. When he finished, he hurried to the wealthy man. He gave him the painting. The man studied it carefully. The artist held his breath. Then the wealthy man said, *“Now this is a picture of true peace.”* He accepted the painting, paid the artist and everyone was happy.

What was this picture of true peace? The picture was 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 lightening. The sea was roaring, waves churning, the dark sky filled with the power of the furious thunderstorm. In the middle of the picture, under a cliff, the artist had painted a small bird, safe and dry in her nest snuggled safely in the rocks. The bird was at peace midst the storm that raged about her.

Jesus came to the disciples amidst the confusion of the rumors of the resurrection, amidst of the chaos of their lives 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)*** Like that mother bird, Jesus came to the disciples while they were dealing with the stormy seas of doubt and said ***“Peace be with you.”***

Let's get a feel for the situation. The disciples were crowded into the upper room with the doors locked. They had heard that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb. The women had told them he had risen, but they didn't believe it. John and Peter went and checked it out. Peter saw but couldn't put it all together. John saw and believed. So, I imagine that he went back and spent the rest of the day trying to convince the rest that what he saw, the empty tomb, the folded linen clothes, the head piece by itself, that these were all signs that Jesus had indeed risen.

Can you imagine that conversation? They were too afraid of the Jews to go out and look for Jesus so they sat in that upper room sulking, praying, arguing, discussing, pondering Christ's words. I imagine John leading the conversation and Peter trying to make sense of it. The women, especially Mary were trying to convince the rest that Jesus had risen. They all were talking, praying, arguing, and then in a moment there stands Jesus in the middle of them, and He says ***"Peace be with you."***

I'd imagine they might have said, *"Is it really you Lord?" "Have you really risen from the dead?"* To prove the fact, ***"When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side." (John 20: 20)*** His hands that bore the marks of the nails, his side where the spear pierced and water and blood flowed from it. When they saw that it was really Jesus, ***"Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord."*** They believed it was Him and rejoiced. I imagine they probably said, *"John was right, Mary was right. He was right when he told us after 3 days he would rise again."* Can you imagine their joy? Here they were cautiously hoping that Jesus had risen and standing right in the middle of them there was Jesus alive. Their reaction of joy, relief, and excitement, was a result of the fact that their despair and fear had been lifted from their hearts. The sadness of Friday had turned into excitement, joy and the fulfillment of the resurrection promise.

Jesus came to the disciples and they were filled with peace. An exciting peace. A peace like a big breath of air releasing from their lungs. A peace that relived their grief, a peace that calmed their fears, a peace that was filled with the joy of the resurrection. ***(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 disciples were now at peace. Jesus was risen. He is alive. They were at peace with Him and each other.

Two painters were asked to paint a picture illustrating peace. The first painted a beautiful sunset above a lake, whose surface absolutely calm and still. Trees surrounded it, meadows stretched to the distant cattle gently grazing. The little cottage on the shore and the setting sun—all spoke of perfect rest. The second painter drew a wild, stormy scene. Heavy black clouds hung overhead; in the center of the picture an tall, massive waterfall whose water erupted in foam. You could almost hear its roar, but the first thing that catches your eye is a small bird, perched in a cleft of a huge rock, absolutely sheltered from all danger, singing sweet notes of joy.

It’s the second painter who could describe the peace that passeth all understanding which is our Lord Jesus Christ brings to each of us through His death and resurrection. You can only have peace with yourself when you have peace with God through Christ. All the disciples had that peace, except Thomas. Thomas hadn’t been with the others when Jesus came, so he didn’t experience that peace.

So Thomas boldly declares, (***“Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.”) But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” (John 20: 24 – 25)*** Thomas wasn’t at peace. He was struggling with his faith. He had questions that no one could answer for him.

“Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20: 26 – 28) That next Sunday, Jesus came and gave that peace that passes all human understanding to Thomas. Thomas was now be at peace as he proclaimed that Jesus was his Lord and God.

Helen Keller wrote, *“If we trust, if we relinquish our will and yield to the Divine will, then we find that we are afloat on a buoyant sea of peace and under us are the everlasting arms.”* Thomas abandoned his doubts, his fears, to questions to the Lord and he was at peace in the everlasting arms of his Lord and Saviour. We need to be like Thomas. We can have peace in our lives, an inner peace if we surrender our will to Christ. Jesus says ***“Peace be with you.”*** Amen.