

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." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 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 20:19-23

Well, we are about two weeks away from another federal election in Canada, and in the meantime we are bombarded with signs and slogans and political promises. While the electoral process is necessary for a free, democratic society to function, it also brings with it a sense of tension regarding the outcome of who will be leading our government and anxiety over what kind of changes will happen in our lives. Add to this the current state of our economy and the world's economy, along with the constant and continuous struggles of instability and war and terrorism we see throughout our world, it's no wonder that research reveals that personal and corporate anxiety and fear are all at an all time high.

Fear and anxiety are paralyzing emotions that numb the soul and spirit. It's been said that that fear is the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind. We see this in first emotional response we read of in the Garden of Eden. Right after Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - *"they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden"* (Genesis 3:8). Here we read of how the first fallen human beings in all creation experienced the first fear of *mastigophobia* -which is the fear of punishment. Since that day we have experienced some fears that are common to most of us, such as *batophobia* (fear of heights), *basophobia* (fear of falling), *nyctophobia* (fear of the dark), *claustrophobia* (fear of confined spaces), or the most common fear of all which is *glossophobia* (fear of speaking in public) which ranks higher than *necrophobia* (fear of death). There are some fears that may be common for us in Port Alberni such as *ombrophobia* (fear of rain) or *homichlophobia* (fear of fog). Sadly there are fears we see in the Christian community such as *epistemophobia* (fear of study/knowledge), *ergophobia* (fear of serving), *gamophobia* (fear of commitment), *ecclesiophobia* (fear of joining the church), *homilophobia* (fear of sermons), *arrhenophobia* (fear of man), and *neophobia* (fear of anything new). But there are some fears that we should have as followers of Jesus Christ, such as *hamartophobia* (fear of sinning), *hadephobia* (fear of hell), and *theophobia* (fear of God).

As I already said, it is significant that a majority of studies and research reveal the two greatest fears shared by mankind are the fear of public speaking) and the fear of death). While most of us to some extent do share in the phobia of public speaking (myself included) – I'm not so sure those of us who claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior have any reason to fear death - *because* Jesus rose from the dead! One of the greatest implications of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus is that we no longer need fear death. Jesus has risen from the grave. God's Word tells us that when Jesus appeared to people after he was raised from the dead back to life, the lives of those who saw him were never again the same. No one walked away from the risen Christ without being drawn deeper into the heart of our living God. No one who saw our risen Savior ever feared death again.

Brothers and sisters - we need not fear death either. In fact in Christ we need not even fear *fear* itself. In John 14:27, just before he was arrested and taken to be crucified, Jesus said, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let your hearts be afraid."* In our text for this morning, after the crucifixion and his death and then his resurrection, Jesus appears before his disciples, who were hiding in "*fear*" behind locked doors, and said to them, *"Peace be with you."* In fact - we read that he said it twice – *"Peace be with you."*

This morning as we continue in our sermon series on the fruits of the Spirit from Paul's letter to those in the Galatian church, we find ourselves looking at the spiritual fruit of "peace." This would have rang true with the Galatians as Paul had written the church because they had been invaded by false teachers who had embraced and taught a gospel contrary to the that gospel Jesus himself taught - and as a result the congregation was experiencing all sorts of fear and anxiety and conflict and division. And so it was in the midst of this struggle Paul wrote the following in Galatians 5:16-25:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

God's Word tells us here that we will *not* have "peace" in life when we live out our lives in the "flesh" - but when we "live by the Spirit" and "keep in step with the Spirit" we will be able to bear the "fruit" of "peace" by the power of the Spirit. Remember that we have seen that "the fruit of the Spirit" in the life of a born-again Christian is the emotional, intellectual, and physical manifestation of that person's spiritual life that has been dramatically and powerfully transformed by the indwelling Spirit of Christ. Remember also that the "fruit of the Spirit" is not something we can do or achieve, but rather a gift of God's mercy and grace we receive and experience when we humbly surrender our hearts, minds and wills to Holy Spirit. The only "peace" we can know on earth is that is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

When the Prince of Peace appears in the midst of fear, hearts are changed and lives are transformed. When we encounter the risen Christ we receive the power of his "peace" to overcome our fears. In the book of Acts, we see the disciples in our text for today, who had been hiding in fear, bore the spiritual fruit of "peace" as their hearts were changed and their lives were transformed by the resurrected Jesus. The kind of world we live in, a world full of fear, is the kind of world our Lord Jesus was born into, lived and died. Christ appeared as the promised hope of God in a world full of fear. But in being our sovereign God he brought with Him the power of His peace. Our text for this morning reveals to us four ways we are empowered by the risen Christ to bear the fruit of the Spirit of "peace."

1) We can bear the spiritual fruit of "peace" in the risen Christ by the *power of His presence*. "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). We read here that on the evening of the day Jesus rose from the dead the disciples were hiding together in a room; the next section tells us that Thomas wasn't with them, and we know that Judas had already taken his own life. The doors were locked "for fear of the Jews." Jesus had been arrested and crucified as a revolutionary, and the authorities would be looking for them also, if for no other reason than that the body of Jesus was missing and since the religious authorities didn't have it, and the Romans didn't have it, the disciples were the next likely choice. And so they barricaded themselves in a room because of "fear" - which in the Greek means "to be alarmed, frightened and in terror." Suddenly, without warning, Jesus appears and says, "Peace be with you!" Somehow in his resurrected body, Jesus was able to walk right through locked doors. He didn't knock; he just walked in, however you walk in a room without opening the door. Luke 24:37 tells us that when Jesus appeared like this they were "startled and frightened." A dead person walking through a locked door will do that to you.

The Greek word here for “*peace*” gives the same meaning as the Hebrew word *shalom*. For the Jew *shalom* means completeness, soundness in body, welfare in health, contentment, peace in all human relationships and peace especially with God in a covenantal relationship. *Shalom* (“*peace*”) is a state of wholeness and harmony that is intended to resonate in all relationships. When used as a greeting, *shalom* was a wish for an outward freedom from disturbance as well as an inward sense of well-being.

The Old Testament reflects this definition of *shalom* in Numbers 6:24-26 where God gave Moses these words to use when blessing His people: *"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."* The New Testament also defines the completeness or wholeness of God’s peace (or *shalom*). In Romans 5:1 we read of peace with God: *"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* This is the vertical dimension of peace, which is ours by the cross. In Matthew 5:9 Jesus tells us that the overflow of our peace with God should cause us to have peace with others: *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."* This is the horizontal dimension of God’s peace in being a redemptive “*peace-maker*” rather than a *peace-keeper*. The apostle Paul also speaks of the peace of God in Philippians 4:6-7: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* This is the internal dimension of peace, a peace that lives within our hearts and souls regardless of circumstance.

Isaiah 9:6 tells us that Jesus Christ is the “*prince of peace.*” When Jesus came into the world, the angels proclaimed words of praise in Luke 2:14: *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"* Jesus offers you and I a peace at every moment of our lives that is dramatically different than the peace the world offers. Our culture communicates that peace is the *absence* of pain, struggle, and suffering. But the peace that Jesus offers us is not of *absence* but of *presence* - the powerful *presence* of Jesus. Jesus provides the peace in his presence, even when we’re in the middle of a pain, struggle or suffering: *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33). The power of the internal peace of the presence of Christ extends beyond our external circumstances. The presence of the risen Jesus powerfully brings peace into our circumstances – past, present, and future.

In the risen Christ we can be at *peace with our past*. Some of us really need to hear this because it’s our fallen tendency to live in the past. Whatever is lurking in our past is forgiven when we repent and ask for forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 tells us: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* The presence of the risen Christ brings the peace as promised in Psalm 103:12: *"As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."*

In Christ we can be at *peace with our present*. We all need to ask ourselves who or what we might be struggling with this morning. The truth is much of life is unmanageable. We live in a fallen, broken world. How quickly things fall apart and come unraveled when we put our faith in anything outside the sovereignty and supremacy of God. When do put our complete trust in God and surrender to Jesus when struggle, pain and suffering come, we can take heart in knowing that *"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit"* (Psalm 34:18). Jesus was broken; he understands those who are broken. Christ came *"to bind up the brokenhearted"* (Isaiah 61:1). Jesus is our *present* peace.

We can also be at *peace with our future*. So many who claim the name of Christ fret about their future. In the risen Jesus our future is assured! You and I have a glorious hope offered to us in Jesus Christ. Christianity offers what no other faith offers, and that is the rock-solid assured hope of an eternally joy-filled future. We don’t have to live in fear. When Jesus passed through the doors and spoke these words, he gave the disciples a glorious future. Though they hid in fear, Jesus brought the disciples the peace spoken of in Psalm 30:5: *"Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning."*

Brothers and sisters we must never be content to cower in the corner over our future. When it comes to tomorrow don't lock yourself behind doors of fear. The presence of Jesus brings the power of peace of what God has for us in the days ahead. In Jeremiah 29:11 God tells us: *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."* We can bear the spiritual fruit of *"peace"* in the risen Christ by the *power of His presence*.

2) We can bear the spiritual fruit of *"peace"* in the risen Christ by the *power of our pleasure in him*. *"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). The key to removing fear from our hearts and lives is to passionately and joyfully embrace the risen God who loves us. True Christianity is not about following rules or social relationships; it is a love relationship with the risen Lord Jesus. When the disciples saw the risen Christ, God's Word says they were *"glad."* The word here literally means, *"to rejoice exceedingly."* Jesus had said this would happen beforehand in John 16:22: *"So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."* Don't let anyone or anything take the joy of the risen Christ away from you. When Jesus is your greatest and deepest joy, he is then your peace. Jesus has been raised from death to life, and that will also happen to those of us who have surrendered our lives to Jesus as Lord and Savior. We can have a deep joy that will never ever evaporate. The promise of Isaiah 25:9 is ours: *"Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."*

It is through the same sheer pure joy of the first disciples meeting with the resurrected Jesus that we as the church today should have something to say to the world. Jesus has risen! Jesus is alive! The power of His presence and our exceeding joy in Him is the power of our peace! The joy of risen Jesus Christ should be present in our worship and service and relationships and work and recreation and fellowship. The passion and pleasure that comes from knowing the risen Savior is not a feeling or emotion, but the reality of having a personal encounter with our most sovereign God Himself in Jesus Christ. *Praise God* that he changes hearts, that he transforms lives, that he heals broken, sin-stained people like you and I. *Praise God* that in the presence of Jesus shame and guilt fade away as we delight in the presence of his peace. *Praise God* that God is most glorified in us when we are most exceedingly joyful in Him. *Praise God* that we can bear the spiritual fruit of *"peace"* in the risen Christ by the power of our pleasure in him. Amen? Amen!

3) We can bear the spiritual fruit of *"peace"* in the risen Christ by the *power of his purpose for us*. *"Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you'"* (John 20:21). Jesus gives us the power of his peace not only by his presence and our pleasure in him – but also by his *purpose* for us. In Christ God not only gives us the power of peace for our own hearts, lives and souls; he also calls us to his purposes. The presence of the risen Christ is not only a personal confirmation of who Jesus is; it's also a personal commission of who we are to be in Him.

The first time in our text, to quiet the disciples' fear, Jesus said, *"Peace be with you!"* The second time in our text, in the midst of the abundant joy at his risen presence, he said, *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* Jesus offers the power of his peace in our lives not only for ourselves, but also so that we might go about his purpose of spreading the joy and bearing the spiritual fruit of his peace with others. In other words - *we are saved in order to be sent*. The Great Commission to spread the gospel to every tongue, tribe and nation is the joyful overflow of the Greatest Commandment to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength. Love is the overflow of the abundant joy we have in God through Jesus Christ that meets the desperate spiritual need of others. The peace we are given through the power of the risen Christ is the resurrected empowered peace we are to share with others. Peace empowered joy overflows in the giving of more peace- empowered joy. This was Jesus' purpose in coming to the world. In John 15:11 he said: *"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."* This is our call also.

This is a purpose that cannot be kept in a room full of locked doors or a life full of personal agendas. Brothers and sisters, we can't get too comfortable within the walls of this building or even in our own homes. The gospel of the power of the peace in the risen Christ must go out from here; it cannot stay within. Jesus came into a locked room to proclaim the power of his peace. Christianity doesn't simply put out its sign and say, "Come." Christianity puts on its shoes and says, "Let's go!" That's why Isaiah 52:7 says: *"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'"*

Jesus' first use of the word "*peace*" in verse 19 was given in order to quiet hearts. This second "*peace*" was given in order to prepare the disciples for the purpose Jesus had prayed to the Father for in John 17:18: *"As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."* What this means is that we need to take the initiative and go out into the world and share the life-saving, soul transforming, gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ. We need to open our mouths and live out the gospel as Jesus did because we may be the only gospel people ever hear and see. And we need to be prepared for opposition, both from within and from without the church because the evil one does prowls about like a roaring lion; he does not want peace among God's people. But when God's people are powerfully living their purpose to glorify the risen Christ by sharing in the abundant overflow of the joy we have in God that meets the needs of others - there will be both power and peace! We can and will bear the spiritual fruit of "*peace*" in the risen Christ when we live out our lives by the *power of Jesus' purpose for us.*

4) We can bear the spiritual fruit of "*peace*" in the risen Christ by the *power of his pardon.* *"And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld'"* (John 20:22-23). There is a power of the peace of the risen Christ that comes into our lives when we are forgiven of our sin. Jesus died on a cross for the payment of all of our sins - past, present and future. Jesus rose from the dead in the tomb to defeat the deadly effect of sin - past, present and future. Because Jesus Christ died for our sins, we are pardoned from sin - past, present and future. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we will rise from the dead - in the future. His new life gives us new life; his peace is now our peace. Our text tells us that, *"he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'* Once forgiven, we are then made instruments and vessels of His abundant mercy and sovereign grace: *"If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld."* Once received, the Holy Spirit ignites a burning passion in our hearts for him that compels us to forgive one another, as the God of life fills the barrenness of our existence with Himself in the person and the power of the risen Jesus Christ. There is peace in the risen Christ that comes by the power of his pardon.

Genesis 2:7 tells us: *"Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature."* Job 33:4 says: *"The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life."* In Ezekiel 37:5 we read: *"Thus says the Lord God . . . 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.'"* John 20:21-22 tells us that Jesus told his disciples, *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you"* and he then *"breathed"* on them and then told them, *"Receive the Holy Spirit."* In Acts 1:8 Jesus then told his disciples: *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"* And in Acts 2 we read that the disciples were *"all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance"* (Acts 2:1-4). And as people gathered around them the apostle Peter shared the gospel with the crowd and *"those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls"* (Acts 2:41). The first disciples of Jesus, empowered by the power of Jesus pardon on the cross, bore the spiritual fruit of "*peace*" in the risen Christ by the power of his presence, the power of their pleasure in him, the power of his purpose for them, and the power of his pardon for their sins on the cross.

As we close we need to remember that the *“fruit of the Spirit”* Paul lists in Galatians 5 has to do with *humble character* that produces the *fruit of unity and service*. What does humble character that produces the *peaceful fruit of unity and service* look like in our lives and in our church? Again, as I’ve done over that last two weeks, I am going to let God’s Word speak to us about this. The apostle Paul speaks of the *“fruit of the Spirit”* peace in both a personal and corporate sense in Philippians 4:4-7: *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* Just as God’s breath made the first creation, so the soul transforming breath of Jesus makes us a new creation. When we are forgiven we are not only made new, we also empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear the fruit of peace of the risen Christ. We were saved to be sent. The peace we have with God through Jesus is to be the peace we share with others. Romans 8:6 says *“the mind set on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”* Once freed of the deadly consequences of sin, our spirits should rise up and be filled with a peace that only comes by the power of the risen Christ. *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope”* (Romans 15:13).

Some years ago a submarine was being tested after repairs and had to remain submerged for many days. When the submarine returned to harbor, the captain was asked, “How did the terrible storm last night affect you?” The officer replied, “What storm? We didn’t know there was one!” The sub had been so far beneath the surface that it had reached the area known to sailors as “the cushion of the sea.” On the surface there may be huge waves but the waters below are never stirred. This is our peace in Jesus. Though storms may rise up in life, there is still peace in the risen Christ by the power of his presence, the power of our pleasure in him, the power of his purpose, and the power of his pardon.

A story is told of a man who was gravely ill and dying decided he finally decided to go to church and get right with God. He put on his clothes and asked his wife to drive him to the nearest church. When he arrived, he saw people leaving the church, greeting the pastor. He and his wife interrupted the minister at the greeting line to ask, “Pastor, *what do we need to do* to have peace with God?” The pastor replied, “That was the topic of this morning’s sermon. But I’m sorry you’re too late.” The husband and wife were both shocked and angry and said, “You mean you won’t tell us how to have peace with God just because we missed your sermon?” To which the pastor replied: “No, that’s not what I’m saying. You asked *what can you do* to have peace with God. What I’m saying is that you’re too late. Jesus has *already done it for you*. You simply need to receive him as your Lord and Savior and then his peace will be yours.” Jesus said: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. . . . I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world”* (John 14:27; 16:33). And so in the light of Galatians 5:25: Let us live by the Spirit, and let us also keep in step with the Spirit - by together bearing the fruit of peace in the risen Christ!

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