

Acts 16 v9-15**Psalm 67****Rev 21 v10,22-22 v56****John 14 v23-29**

As we are coming to the end of the Easter season, I decided to have a look back at the emotions that were recorded by the gospel writers of how Jesus' followers were feeling over that time between his death and ascension. And I found that these emotions fell into two distinct groups:

fear	doubt	disbelief	great joy	worship
alarm	sadness	terror	awe	amazement
stubbornness		startled	wonder	eagerness
faithlessness	frightened		recognition	longing

And in between this change, we hear Jesus saying, "Peace be with you." It's not that this change should surprise us because Jesus had said it was going to happen: "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you'... I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe." And over all this Jesus gave his disciples peace.

What do you think of as peace? A lack of conflict; freedom from disturbance; a limited time of ease – 'he just wanted to drink his pint in peace'? I don't think that's what Jesus meant by peace, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." This is not a peace that ends when the scented candle splutters out or the bar tab has to be paid – this is peace from God that is permanent.

Imagine yourself on a quiet beach or up in the hills or wandering through some beautiful ornamental garden: no traffic, no bustle, no jostling – peace and quiet, a restful atmosphere dependent upon and produced by your surroundings. You may even have had to pay for this time-limited privilege! My son, Pater, has bought me an hour's massage for my birthday. I will really enjoy it and I will be like a zoned-out zombie for the duration of the massage and at least for ten more minutes until I'm back in the car park and trying to right out into the mainstream of traffic – then that peace will be well and truly shattered! "I do not give to you as the world gives."

When Jesus said to his followers, "Peace be with you," what do you think they felt – awe, wonder, amazement.... Yes, I'm certain of it but equally, I don't think the fear of the Jews or of the Roman authorities disappeared. The disciples weren't suddenly granted immunity from persecution or future oppression or victimization. They weren't translated forever into heavenly realms playing harps and sipping milk and honey BUT they were given a gift (and we are given that same gift) – the peace of the Lord.

What do you do when you received a gift? I'm a squeezer. I like to get hold of it and turn it round and poke and squeeze and try to guess what's in there. I do manage to wait until the appointed day - Christmas, birthday or whatever but I don't for one minute leave the gift alone. I'm desperate to get my hands on it. I've even been known to wait up until one minute past midnight just to satisfy my curiosity. Some people, and not always children, can't even wait that long! On Christmas Day last year, Peter and I went over to my daughter's house and we hadn't even got up the steps to the front door when it was flung open and 3-year old Isaac was there waving a large half-empty plastic jar at us. "Peter, Peter, we bought you a present. It's jelly beans. We've eaten them!" And that was it, Peter's present open, out there, simply too much excitement for it to be contained! Now, I know that 's a bit simplistic (although true) but the excitement and the value that that gift had was too great to be contained. It was too great to have limits put on it. I'd like to think that's something of the excitement we feel when we are given this gift from Jesus. It's simply too exciting to be contained and we grab it with both hands and receive it with unalloyed joy.

Jesus gave us and continues to give us his peace and also the ability to use that peace – strength and help from the Holy Spirit but “not as the world gives.” Jesus’ peace does not depend on beautiful, tranquil surroundings; lack of conflict; a whale-song cd and scented candles. Jesus’ peace is not dependent on you or on your surroundings. Jesus’ peace is not dependent upon your emotions. Jesus’ peace is true peace; peace that passes all understanding. Peace that SURpasses or transcends all understanding.

Just think about what the disciples were going to face in the next few hours and days following this discourse. Jesus was to be arrested, tried and tortured. The disciples would try to make themselves invisible in their terror, justifiably fearing for their lives. Everything they had worked for in the preceding three years with Jesus was demolished before their eyes. So Jesus empowered them beforehand, “I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur you will believe” (v29).

Think of the Christians’ lives you have shared, your own life: no disasters, no fears, no illness, no dread, no accidents, no dark places, loneliness? No, I didn’t think so. So where was God (where is God) at these times? Look for the gift of Jesus: “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.” Let the Holy Spirit unwrap this gift for you. *Give the broken pieces of your life to God and God will give you unbroken peace.* We are not in control: God is.

Peace is not found in our surroundings: it is a gift. And it is a gift we have to unwrap and use. Jesus prepares us to live in the real world and empowers us through the Holy Spirit who is our constant help and comforter. “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

There’s a poem I would like to share with you at this point:

I have in my hands two boxes, which God gave me to hold.
He said, “Put all your sorrows in the black, and all your joys in the gold.”
I heeded his words, and in the two boxes, both my joys and sorrows I store
but though the gold became heavier each day, the black was as light as before.

With curiosity, I opened the black box.
I wanted to find out why and I saw, in the base of the box,
a hole which my sorrows-stored had fallen out.

I showed the hole to God, and mused aloud, "I wonder where my sorrows could be."
He smiled a gentle smile at me. "My child, they're all here with me."
I asked, "God, why give me the boxes?
Why the gold, and the black with the hole?"
"My child, the gold is for you to count your blessings, the black is for you to let go."

“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.” The peace of the Lord be always with you.

Resources:

<http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/the-peace-of-christ-christian-cheong-sermon-on-peace-91772.asp>