

“Peace Be With You”
John 20:19-31

Chan Willis – F.P.C.-L.C./Welsh
April 28, 2019

As you all are well aware... particularly from many of my *music* references... I am a child of the 60's and 70's. And because I grew up in those 'tumultuous' times in our country's history (and these days are NOT?), as I read today's passage with its many references by Jesus to "PEACE," I found my thoughts wandering to images of that word 'peace.' Perhaps the most famous symbol for peace is ____ .

It was designed in 1958 for a British campaign for nuclear disarmament. You might be surprised as to its origin. It is NOT, as some have suggested, the broken crosshair of a gunsight, or a **broken cross**. (In fact, its designer, Gerald Holtom, considered a Christian cross, but there was concern over the use of that symbol of our faith being used in protest marches). It actually comes from the semaphore signals (naval flag communication) for the letters 'N' and 'D' superimposed on one another. 'N' and 'D'. (For 'Nuclear Disarmament.')

In our days of 'text, tweets, and instagrams,' semaphore flags are *definitely* a 'dated reference' (my specialty! 😊)

Not long after this iconic symbol was created came another one in the 60's, during the protests over the Vietnam 'Conflict'... War. [**'V' pic**] One thing I was reminded of is that you want to pay attention to the direction your hand is facing. If it's facing in, and the back of your hand out, in some countries that will be quite far removed from a 'peaceful' meaning... but rather, an *insulting* gesture!

Most of you know, however, that that 'V' symbol was one most associated with "**victory.**" Particularly in WWII, and its association with that great British statesman Winston Churchill. In that same era I grew up in, it was *infamously* associated with a former President Richard Nixon (or 'Tricky Dicky,' as he was also known.)

I am pleased to say that it is still in use... I understand that it is still quite popular in Asian culture like Japan. Many of you can find images like this on your phone. And if you'd like a kind of 'retro' flair back to those 'hippie' days, there's this 'flower child' version. In fact, our '30-something' daughter Catie has a favorite expression that she loves to share, especially with her nieces and nephews... "*Peace Out!*" [**2 hand gestures**] She makes me proud... (as they ALL do.)

The most time-honored symbol of **peace**, however, goes MUCH farther back than the mid-20th C. But back to the ancient times of Noah and the Ark. Yes, the **dove** and the **olive branch**. As Noah sought a sign that there was **life** and **hope** in the midst of an overwhelming flood of **destruction**, there came that dove returning with a symbol of the peace to come... that, in the words of St. Augustine, that famous Roman-African early Christian theologian of the 4th/5th Centuries, "*perpetual peace is indicated by the olive branch that the dove brought with it when it returned to the ark.*" Interesting, isn't it, that this symbol of God's peace, the dove, also is so closely associated with the Holy Spirit. **Peace. The Holy Spirit.** Let's hang on to that connection for a little later...

The most tangible expression of God's peace for His troubled creation would come thousands of years later in the person of **Jesus Christ**. The One for whom one of His popular 'pseudonyms' is the "*Prince of Peace.*" The truth is that we live in a world that too often seeks to rob us of our peace, our joy, our hope. In Jesus' words, "***The thief comes only to rob, kill, and destroy. I have come so that everyone would have life, and have it in its fullest.***" (John 10:10) Other translations talk about a life that is "Abundant"... "full and good." Not lives plagued by **fear**, or **distractions**, or **doubt**. But rather, lives worthy of the name 'disciple'...

As we consider Jesus' appearance to those first disciples after His resurrection, there were three times that He repeats that same salutation: "***Peace be with you.***" (John 20:20, 21, 26) And each time, it would appear that He addresses a particular challenge to that 'abundant' life He came to give. Challenges that affect Jesus' followers then and now! The first one being that of...

FEAR. In that first verse, it says that "***the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for FEAR of the Jews.***" (John 20:19) Why were they so frightened of their own countrymen? Well, hmmm... didn't work out too well for their 'pastor,' their 'Rabbouni,' did it? (How about us? Can WE be 'afraid' of OUR 'fellow citizens?' Fear of confrontation with people 'out there'... or even in the 'safety' of this sanctuary?) But after his initial words of reassurance, Jesus immediately shows them His wounded hands and side, at which "***the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.***" (John 20:20) By His words... AND His actions... they took comfort in knowing that their Lord was with them. They were reminded of the truth of

those words of His Father: ***"I will never leave you nor forsake you."*** (Deut. 31:6) No matter how the 'storms of uncertainty' swirled around them... no matter how they might fear what was to become of them by forces outside their control... His peace brought them joy.

We might recall another time when the disciples were fearful in the midst of a 'tempestuous' experience... a time when they thought that Jesus had abandoned them... even though he was right there in their midst. In Mark's gospel we read about a 'stormy boat ride' during which ***"he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!"*** (Sound familiar?) ***And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."*** (Mark 4:39) Whether a storm of natural causes, or human ones, Jesus spoke with clarity and strength, ***"Peace! Be Still! ... and there was great calm."***

Now I know that he was speaking to the winds and the waves. But was he not also talking TO those fearful disciples? Just as much to the 'winds of adversity' and the 'waves of anxiety,' is Jesus not speaking to those *affected* by them? When our God speaks to those followers that have come before us, He also speaks to us. As we too are buffeted by winds and waves of daily living... as we encounter the fears of pressures from without and within... Jesus says to us, ***"Peace! Be Still! ... and there was great calm."*** As we listen to the voice of Jesus... to 'be still and know that He is God'... we experience 'great calm'.

Just this week on a Christian radio station I heard it said that there nearly **370** instances in the Scriptures were it says to NOT FEAR... to NOT BE AFRAID. Which works out to be right at one for each and every day. That God does not want us to live in fear ONE SINGLE DAY! Every morning when we wake up, we should thank God for another day, one for which we will not worry about what that day will bring because our God is with us. There's a great song in our "Sing the Faith" book that I always consider a children song, but certainly applies to us children of ALL ages: It is based on 1 Peter 5:7: *"I cast all my cares upon you, Lord; I lay all of my burdens down at your feet."* Why? Because, as the verse says, we are to ***"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."*** (1 Peter 5:7)

The second occasion Jesus speaks of 'peace' comes right after the disciples 'cast all their anxiety on him.' ***"Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I***

send you.'²² ***When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*** (John 20:21-22)

So, after having just given them a peace to calm their fears, why did Jesus say it again so quickly? Perhaps because Jesus didn't want them to get so wrapped up in their **praise** OF their Lord that they lost sight of their **PURPOSE** FOR Him. That in their **delight** to be in His presence, the disciples did not get **distracted** from their calling, their 'Great Commission': ***"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."*** (John 20:21)

In order to accomplish their daunting mission, the disciples needed God's help. They no doubt remembered the type of promise given by David, another _servant-leader who required God's power to overcome his own weaknesses: ***"The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace."*** (Psalm 29:11) In order to have the strength... the **power...** and the **peace** necessary, Jesus ***"breathed on them"***... gave them the 'inspiration' of the Holy Spirit. **Peace...** and the **Spirit...** both represented by the... **dove.**

No matter WHAT God has called you to do... from ministry in the work place, to the church, to your family, to simply putting one foot in front of the other... you need God's POWER and PEACE. His STRENGTH and SERENITY. The Holy Spirit provides us the spiritual strength and the emotional focus, the mental wisdom and the physical stamina to be a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ. ***Power and peace rooted in hope.*** I am reminded of Paul's words to the Romans that I offer to you: ***"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him (so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.)"*** (Romans 15:13 (Repeat with congregation using 1st person singular pronouns).

Aside from FEAR and DISTRACTIONS, Jesus brings peace to those who **DOUBT**. The term 'doubting Thomas' is one that is familiar to many, whether or not they have an Biblical 'literacy' or not. Thomas was that disciple that would not take his friends' word for what they saw. He would not believe in the Resurrected Christ until he saw it for himself. "Seeing is believing."

So, when Jesus appeared once again, this time with Thomas present, I would imagine that his heart was racing. That doubt that he had so firmly expressed was about to be wiped away. And yet, mixed in with the excitement of seeing, and believing, that Jesus was indeed resurrected, how would Jesus react to his wavering faith, his distrust of his fellow disciples, his

DOUBT that Jesus really did what he said he would? But that patient, loving Lord gave him a gentle rebuke, yet still glad that he had finally come to believe. ***“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet come to believe.”*** (John 20:29) In the same way that He would speak to any of our friends who resist in their faith, who have doubts, and yet finally come to believe. It is those ‘doubting Thomases’ in the world that Jesus said earlier in this gospel, ***“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble*** (persecution, distress, trials). ***But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*** (John 16:33) Jesus brings peace to our troubled lives... so we are to take heart. Through Christ, we are OVERCOMERS.

For my closing remarks, I had a well-thought out connection with my opening words about symbols of peace... until I saw the news this morning. Does the name **‘Yisroel Goldstein’** mean anything to you? He is the rabbi at the synagogue in Poway California who came face-to-face with a 19 year old armed with an automatic rifle who had entered that place of worship during their time of Sabbath service. From what I gathered from the news report, Rabbi Goldstein Put his hands up to both protect himself and attempt to bring calm to a very volatile, violent situation, the gunman shot at the rabbi, severely injuring fingers on one hand. The assailant fled when pursued by an off-duty customs officer. In spite of his wounds, Goldstein went to a nearby hallway to put his arms around a group of children there, giving them protection and comfort.

Later, while he and the congregation awaited police detectives to investigate what had now become a crime scene, Rabbi Goldstein delivered his *sermon* for that day... now THAT’S dedication! I love you all dearly, but I’m not sure that even **I** would be preaching after having a finger shot off! (Shooting off my *mouth* is one thing... my finger is another!) Later in that same news broadcast they interviewed the rabbi from his hospital bed, where he continued to ‘preach’ a message of hope, strength, and peace.

Rabbi Yisroel Goldstein is obviously not a ‘Christian’... and yet, similar to another Jewish ‘Teacher’ whom we Christians follow... one who put his hands out to be wounded in order to protect those he loved. Goldstein is much like that ‘Shepherd’ of the flock to whom we listen... the One who also puts His arms around His children to comfort them in the face of fear and

doubt. Our own 'Rabbouni' is there encouraging us to not let the 'distractions' of hate and evil obscure the truth of God's overcoming love and ultimate protection.

May we NEVER forget what is the BEST 'symbol' of peace.. the **Cross of Christ**. The same Jesus who spoke these words of comfort to His disciples.... Then and now: ***"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. So let not your heart be troubled, and do not be afraid."*** (John 14:27) ... And may all God's children say, 'AMEN!'

PRAYER TIME: ***"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God... and the peace of God, which transcends all (human) understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Phil. 4:6-7)

CHARGE: ***"Peace... Out... One Way: Jesus."*** ('For lasting PEACE... figure it OUT... there's only ONE WAY...JESUS.)

BENEDICTION: ***"The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you (his) peace."***(Numbers 6:24-26)