



Sermon Transcript

May 3, 2020

God's One Story of Redemption

The Peace that Restores Us

John 20:19-29

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on May 3, 2020 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Wally Culup. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text
John 20:19-29

¹⁹ 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." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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."

²⁶ 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." ²⁷ 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." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Introduction

Good morning, today we will be concluding the Messiah period of our Casket Empty study and finally reach the climax of God's redemptive plan, and It only took us 4,000 years to get here. When Jesus breathed his last words on the cross; "It is Finished" (John 19:30), he was proclaiming the completion of God's redemptive plan for mankind. This verse is only recorded in the Gospel of John, and the Greek word translated "it is finished" is *tetelestai*, an accounting term that means "paid in full." When Jesus uttered those words, He was declaring the debt owed to His Father was wiped away completely and forever. It was not a debt that he owed to the Father; but rather a debt that was owed by mankind—the debt of sin, which Jesus' paid on our behalf. Jesus' death on the cross finalizes God's redemptive plan and allows us to experience the peace of the Lord. A complete peace which restores our broken relationship to our creator God, Amen. Now before we get into God's word would you please pray with me:

Father God as we gather here this morning whether it's on our phones, computers, or televisions and I pray that you will open up your word to us this morning Farther, so that we may be spiritually transformed through the hearing of your word. Father I pray that as we proclaim the truth of scripture it may glorify you. I pray that today's word would touch the ears of all people who hear it. May our hearts be filled with the gospel truth so we can grow in the knowledge you. Apart from you Lord we can do nothing. So, it is in the name Jesus that we pray. Amen.

Our text this morning is found in John 20:19-29 . So, in this part of the story we find the disciples hiding out behind locked doors fearing for their lives. It is Sunday night, the evening of the resurrection. We don't know the exact location, but some scholars have speculated the disciples were locked in the upper room, the same room where just a few short days ago they broke bread with Jesus on the night of his arrest. Now you would think that the disciples would be out celebrating and dancing in the streets. After all they had heard that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb. Mary had already testified to them that she saw the risen Jesus (John 20:18), and we read in the Luke chapter 24 that Cleopas and Simon had an encounter with the risen Christ on their way to Emmaus and they too returned and testified to disciples that they saw and spoke to the risen Jesus. So, the word was out, but they were still afraid and in hiding. I do not think I can blame them after all they had a rough couple of days and probably were not thinking straight. They watched their leader get arrested and be brutally put to death on the cross. They were marked men and feared that they would be next. I do not think the reality of Jesus' resurrection has set in. If it did, I do not think they would been hiding

out, scared for their lives. I personally would like to think that they would have been out shouting on the rooftops telling world about the good news. I could even envision them running out and finding the Sanhedrin who were responsible Jesus' arrest and teasing them with "Na, na,na,na nah Jesus is alive". But that is not at all how we find them. We find them scared and hiding for their lives. But all of that is about to change once they encounter the resurrected Jesus, and through the power of the holy spirit their fear is transformed into a world changing faith that we share with them today.

You see, in some sense the response to fear that the apostles exhibited is not so different from how we respond to fear ourselves. I would even venture to say that many of you who are joining us this morning, myself included while we are believers and followers in Christ we don't always live or act like we fully comprehend the significance of Jesus' resurrection, or at least we have forgotten the significance of it. You see Jesus' work on the cross has restored our relationship with God. Jesus' work on the cross has paid our debt for sin. We no longer need to struggle with fear and doubt. As frightening as life and death can be, death is not the end of road for believers in Christ. We can claim the eternal promises given to us God because Jesus has redeemed us and has restored peace in our lives. The peace of God which was lost in the garden when man sinned has been restored. It is a peace that surpasses all understanding. (Phil 4:7) This is not just a peace we have when all of life's circumstances are aligned in our favor. This is a complete, whole inner peace of God that says to us; hey even though you are in the middle of the storm, everything is going to be OK. Just as the apostles forgot or did not realize the access they had to God's peace; we too need to be occasionally reminded of what Christ has given us.

Jesus has provided us with access to God's Heavenly Kingdom, but that does not mean that everything on this side of heaven, prior to Christ's triumphant return is going to be all unicorns and rainbows. Peter reminds us in first Peter chapter 2, we live as strangers living in a foreign land. Pastor Scott also reminded us last week that we live in a Kingdom of darkness (a fallen world). This kingdom is ruled by Satan and is filled with death, destruction, famine, pain, injustice, and suffering. This kingdom is result of our fractured relationship with God. When we turned away from God and rebelled, we welcomed in this dark kingdom because we wanted to live according to our own rules, we wanted to be God of ourselves. So, God gave us over to ourselves and now the world reflects our rejection of God. So yes, there are plenty of things to fear while we live in this kingdom of darkness. Just look outside right now amid the Covid pandemic thousands of people are dying, people are losing their jobs, their lively hoods. People are afraid of getting sick or having a loved get sick. Isolation and distancing are driving us

all a little crazy. People are asking the questions when this is going to end, is it going to end? What am I going to do if we run out of toilet paper? So, there are plenty of justifiable fears that surround us. However, none of the chaos that surrounds us can pierce the Kingdom of God that has come through Christ. So, we can rest in peace knowing that Christ has come and has fulfilled the scriptures and has brought peace to those who Love him. My hope this morning is that we are all reminded that even though we currently live in Kingdom of darkness, our permanent address is in the Kingdom of God. We can still have the peace of God on this side of Heaven because Jesus paid our debt in full. Jesus came and fulfilled God's redemptive plan; We are redeemed and restored.

As we reach the end of Messiah period and enter the time of Pentecost, I would like to drive home 3 key points that I believe bridge the gap between God's redemptive plan and what we do with it now while we await Christ's return.

1. God's redemptive plan lead us to the cross.
2. God's redemptive plan restores peace.
3. God's redemptive plan includes a job for us.

Why does God's redemptive plan lead to the cross? To answer this question, we need to go back to the garden.

GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN LEADS US TO THE CROSS.

When Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation in the garden and chose not to submit to God's authority the relationship between man and his creator God was fractured. The curse of sin was death and banishment from God's Kingdom; Generation after generation we see the people of God live in this repeating historical pattern of repentance, deliverance, turning away from God, judgement, followed by repentance, and so on an so on. We get 4000 years of this recurring them. However, despite man's rebellion and failure God had a plan from the very beginning, to restore mankind and his Kingdom on Earth for once and for all.

In Genesis 3:15 God Promises a "Seed" from a woman, who will have victory over sin and death. It was written that this seed will reverse the curse and renew God's creation. God's redemptive plan begins in the garden and continues to unfold throughout the Old testament history. We have seen throughout our Journey in the Casket Empty series how God's redemptive plan for mankind required a sacrifice as attornment (payment) for our sin. The pattern of suffering and sacrifice is seen throughout Old Testament history, and finally reaches its apex with the coming the

Messiah.

Due to our sin, our relationship with God has been severed; However, the cross is the bridge in God's redemptive plan which gives us access to God's Kingdom through Jesus' sacrifice. Only the blood of Jesus can restore our relationship to God the Father.

In an article entitled "How Does the Cross of Christ Make Sense of the Kingdom of God?" The author Jeremy Treat sums it up best when he writes: "The kingdom and the cross are held together by the Christ-Israel's Messiah-who brings God's reign on earth through his atoning death on the cross. Restoration of God's kingdom is the goal of the cross, and the cross is the means by which the kingdom comes".

Without atonement there can be no peace with God. And well know, that man in and by himself is not capable of saving himself. Romans 3:10-12 says: "As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

This verse perfectly sums up why we could never be or do good enough to earn our own salvation. We alone do not have the power to restore our broken relationship with God. Therefore, God needed a plan of redemption for mankind. We are not capable of saving ourselves if left to ourselves. If we had died on the cross instead of Jesus our punishment would have been deserved, it would have been justified. The penalty for our sin would have been the physical as well as spiritual death. A punishment that includes living for eternity in torment apart from God and his heavenly kingdom. You see the cross is the destination for all of us. There is no avoiding it. The cross is the destination for all mankind. Our rebellion and disobedience brought us here, we all deserve to die on the cross. Victory over sin is through sacrifice and it is by God's mercy and grace that we are reconciled to him, through the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross; To quote the beloved hymn "Jesus paid it all". Your debt is paid! The debt you owed was paid in full "tetelestai". Once again to quote Jeremy Treat's article he writes: "the kingdom and the cross are held together by Christ". Because of Christ's work on the cross we can have access to God's heavenly kingdom.

God's redemptive plan reminds us how much God loves us. God does not desire for any of us to die and live apart from him, that is why he sent Christ die in our place. Christ died for the sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. (1 Peter 3:18)

The reality of this good news should bring unprecedented joy and peace into the lives of believers. So, then we must ask the question: Why do we still struggle with anxiety and fear? The reality is: Christ is risen, our debt is paid, we are no longer slaves to sin and death. Christ has gone and prepared a place for us in God's heavenly kingdom, so why do we still struggle to find peace? I am saved. I am a child of God why don't I have peace? I think once we reflect on our own struggle to find peace in this world we can suddenly relate to how the disciples felt and why they reacted the way they did in their circumstance.

THE CROSS BRINGS PEACE

The reason we do not have peace, and the reason why I believe the Disciples displayed a lack of peace (through their display of fear) is because we are trying to define the peace of God through a worldly perspective. You see in the world we are considered to have or be at peace when the circumstances of our lives are favorable. You are at peace when things are going well. If you, your friends and family are safe and healthy, you have a job, there's food on the table, your bills are paid, you're not at war or fighting with anyone, you have plenty of toilet paper in the closet, then you must be at peace. So, based on the worldly criteria for peace, who out here can honestly say they have peace right now. I do not know about you, but these last few weeks have put a cramp in my peace department. I worry about the wellbeing of my family and friends, I worry that we might catch the covid virus and get seriously sick, or die. I am worried about the possibility of losing my job due to budget cuts. I am worried about the future of our world and nation, and list goes on and on. There are plenty of things that are disturbing my peace right now. So, if this world, this kingdom of darkness gets to define what peace is then I do not think any of us ever had or will have peace. Sure, we may find contentment but that's not peace, not the peace that that Jesus offers. The peace of Christ is a peace that transcends our circumstances. Jesus says in John 14:27 "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 only true rest we have in this world is found in the peace of God. The peace of God is that peace you have when the entire world is crumbling around you, you may have lost your job, a loved one, you are at wits end, you may be sick, broke, dying or alone and yet the still small voice of God says "It is going to be alright. Jesus is your rest he is your peace. When the disciples joyfully sang hymns of praise and glory to God while awaiting their executions, that was the peace of God. Every time someone boldly stands up for what is good righteous and holy in the face of opposition, that is the peace of Christ.

Every time you can lift your head and give praise and give glory to God during times of

great trial and tribulation, that is the peace of God. I can tell you that there have been times in my life when life's circumstances had brought me to some very dark places. There were plenty of nights where I was angry at God and wrestled with for not answering my prayers. There were times when I felt God had turned his back on me. My pain would turn to anger and then anger to despair. It was when I had finally lost all my energy to fight and surrendered my will to God that I found peace. Now my problems did not magically go away, but there was a sense of peace that came over me when I confessed that God is God and I am not. He knows the beginning from the end, and I can find peace in knowing that he is in control.

We all need to be reminded that true peace is not rooted in our circumstances. True peace comes from the knowledge of the Lord and is rooted deep within our souls regardless of our circumstances. The peace of God is a peace that reminds us that everything is going to be ok. The peace of God reminds us that he will never leave you or forsake us. He is holding you in his arms. To a non-believer this type of peace seems ridiculous. The non-believer shouts how can you possibly be at peace? You have no money, you are sick, your dog just died, somebody just hit your car. How you even seen the news there is no peace. How can you possibly have peace in a time like this? Well you can have peace like this if your peace is in the Lord. Christ gives not as the world gives. Now I do not understand the mystery of it all and even Paul writes in Philippians 4:7 that it is a peace that transcends all understanding.

You see the peace of God is so much greater than any peace that comes from the world. It is the peace of the Lord that equips and empowers the disciples to set aside their fears and boldly go into the world proclaiming the gospel.

In verse 19 of our passage Jesus appears to the Disciples and the first thing he says to the disciples is "Peace be with you". He then proceeds to show them the wounds in his hands and side to further prove to them that he was indeed the risen messiah. Then in verse 21 Jesus once again offers them Peace. In the context of the passage the Hebrew translation of Peace be with you is Shalom. I really feel that the English translation does not do justice to the true, deeper meaning of the word Shalom. While I was preparing this section of the sermon, I wanted to find a concisely define the concept of Shalom and all it entails without making it a separate sermon. So, during my study I came across the Bible Project video on the topic of Shalom which does an excellent job at explaining the meaning of Shalom (Peace of God). So, at this time I would like to share that video with you

So, you see Jesus is are Shalom, he is the one that makes everything whole. He is the one

that restores our relationship with God. Jesus is the corner stone of our faith. This peace, this Shalom is not dependent on our circumstances good or bad. This Shalom is a peace that Transends all our pain and fears. It is the peace that defies worldly logic. It is that still small voice of God that says everything is ok.

And it was God's peace given by Jesus through the power of the holy Spirit that gave the apostles the courage to proclaim the gospel in the face of persecution and death. It is this same peace that resides in us today. We just need to be reminded that we have been gifted this peace, and we need to claim it.

SHARE THE GIFT OF PEACE

Now we come to the point where we must ask the question what do we do now?

We see in verse 21 right after Jesus offers them peace, he proves to them that he is the resurrected Jesus, by displaying his wounds he goes on to offer them peace again and there's a good reason why he offers them his peace again because the first command the resurrected Christ gives the disciples is to go out into the world as he did and proclaim the Kingdom of God. Jesus said to them "Peace be with you As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." (John 20:21) Jesus is saying to the disciples ok you need to go out into the world and do the things and say the things I did. You know the things that got me arrested, tortured, and crucified. Yes, I am sending to do these things too, ok? Can you see why Jesus needed to remind them and bless them with his peace multiple times. The challenges and difficulties these men are about to face for the advancement of God's kingdom is more than most of us will experience in 100 lifetimes. Yet these great men of God went from fear to faith by the peace of God through the power of the Holy spirit, that empowers all believers to overcome and do great things in his name.

So, we come to the end of God's redemptive plan. However, for the disciples the end of God's redemptive plan marked the beginning of their personal ministries. In verse 21 we read John's account of the great commission where Jesus equips them with the power of the Holy Spirit and sends them out to proclaim the gospel message. Jesus then goes on to say in verse 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any it, it is withheld". Now other denominations will take this verse and imply that this means that Jesus gave the disciples the power to forgive sins. However, we need to understand the power to forgive sins rests solely in Christ. Ed Stetzer, in his book titled "The Missional Church," gives us a good explanation of John 20:23 he says "Jesus bestowed on his followers authority to announce access or disbarment from God's kingdom based on reception or denial of the

gospel message. For those who reject Jesus, his messengers are commissioned to say that they do not have forgiveness of sins. So, the meaning behind verse 23 is Jesus is sending the disciples into the world, empowered by the Spirit, to proclaim the risen Christ. Some people will accept their testimony, and others will reject it. How they respond will determine whether they will find themselves among those whose sins are forgiven or among those whose sins are retained.

God was present in the work of Jesus; Jesus was present in the work of the disciples and Jesus continues to be present in the work of Christians still today. As believers in Christ we are all sent to share the Gospel with the world. That doesn't mean that we are all supposed to become preachers, or missionaries but it does mean as it is written in 1 Peter 3:15 we should always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

As we now move into verses 24-29 of our passage we read about Thomas' encounter with the risen Jesus. We don't have the time this morning to further explore the faith transformation of our friend doubting Thomas but I feel it is important for us to address the words that Jesus speaks in verse 29, where Christ says "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." This statement by Christ affirms the need for the command he gives the disciples in verse 21 to go into world proclaim the gospel. For blessed will be those who hear the gospel and receive it without ever having seen the physical manifestation of Christ. When we share the good news and bring forth the truth of God's word, we are active participants in God's work, helping to bring the lost to Christ.

Our job as Christians in response to verse 29; While The apostles had the privilege of seeing Jesus in the flesh, those who come to faith today must come as a result of hearing God's word and by seeing Jesus displayed through us by the way we live our lives. Jesus has blessed us and has blessed all who will come to faith by hearing the word.

CONCLUSION

We have seen God's redemptive plan unfold, beginning in the Old Testament with the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 and spanning 4000 years through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament Gospels. We have seen mans need for redemption and have seen God's patience and love for us though his redemptive plan. Even though the kingdom of God has been ushered in through Christ's redemptive work it is not yet complete. As a result, until Christ returns, we will continue to live in a dark kingdom that is in constant battle with God. A world engulfed

with sin, pain and suffering. But the hope and joy we have is rooted in the peace of God. The peace of Christ says your debt is paid in full. The peace of Christ restores your relationship with God.

It is Jesus' peace that says no matter what is happening to me or around me it's going to be ok. God loves me and cares for me. He has called me by name and has promised to never leave or forsake me. We can rest in the peace and love of God. George Ladd in his 1959 book entitled "The Gospel of the Kingdom: (Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God)" writes: "Love is that gift of the spirit, above all others, which will characterize our perfected fellowship in the age to come. This love we now enjoy, and the church on earth will be a colony of heaven, enjoying in advance the life of the age to come." You see the love we share and enjoy now is only a foretaste of God's heavenly Kingdom that is yet to come. We find our peace in knowing that the best is yet to come. Everything is going to be ok.

So, the three big take a ways I would like to leave you with this morning are:

1. God's redemptive plan leads to and is fulfilled on the cross. Our debt is paid in full through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Christ death and resurrection redeems and restores us into God's Kingdom. Our debt is paid in full.
2. Our peace and our joy comes from knowing that Christ has paid it all. Regardless of the chaos that surrounds us we know that everything is going to be ok. While we live in a kingdom of darkness, we look upward and onward to the kingdom of God that is still yet to be fully realized and rest in the hope of God's word.
3. God's redemptive plan may have been fulfilled but we as believers in Christ are called by God, just as the first disciples were called to proclaim the good news, so that others may come to know the joy we have in Christ. We did not come to faith because we saw with our own eyes the physical body of Christ. We came to faith by hearing and believing the written word of God that has been passed down to us by those who were witnesses to the risen Messiah.

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COMMUNITY
GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. What current concerns or worries are robbing you of your peace? What do you know about Christ and your relationship with God that speaks peace to your situation?
2. What is one thing you can do this week to be an agent of peace to someone in need? As a group, hold each other accountable to this.

Diving Into The Word

3. Read John 20:19-29. Can you relate to the disciples in this passage? What do you make of Jesus pronouncing peace three times? How does this speak to your own life?
4. Romans 5:1-5. What is the result of having peace with Christ?
5. Read Philippians 4:4-9. How do we experience the peace of Christ? Can you give an example from your own life when you experienced the peace of God “that surpasses understanding?”
6. Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. In what way can you be a “minister of reconciliation?”

Taking It Home

7. What is the one thing you want to do this week as a result of your conversation?