

"Peace to You"

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit (Luke 24:36-37).

Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

"Startled and frightened." These are not terms that you would naturally equate with Easter. Yet, in today's Gospel reading, these are exactly the words Luke uses to describe the disciples' reaction to seeing the risen Christ. And, even though, Luke tells us that the disciples thought this inexplicable appearance of Jesus was a ghost, the reason for their shock and fear had more to do with paranoia than the paranormal.

You see, the last time these disciples had seen Jesus, He was on the way to the cross, and rather than oppose the injustice of His execution and stand against His enemies, these men had abandoned Jesus. With the lone exception of John, they had all simply walked away. And, if this wasn't bad enough, Peter had even called down curses from heaven as he vehemently denied knowing Jesus. Now, here was the Lord standing before them, and whether He was a specter or not, these men knew what they had done. They had failed their friend in His greatest hour of need, and they understood what their denial demanded. On some level, the disciples must have expected punishment, and for good reason, they were startled and frightened. Yet, as they braced themselves for the reprimand they knew they deserved, Jesus delivered a word of restoration, "Peace to you!" No punishment. No penance. Just peace. And this forgiving word of Christ changed everything.

Recently, the Lutheran church lost a great teacher. Dr. Rod Rosenblatt, who taught at Concordia Irvine for 40 years, and served as a founder of 1517.org, died on February 2. Dr. Rosenblatt was known for an honest theology that persistently pointed to the Gospel of grace in Jesus. One example that typifies the teaching of Rosenblatt was a story he often told about an experience with his dad.

Rosenblatt was a high school student in the 1960s, and, shortly after he turned 16, his dad gave him a 1953 Buick that he absolutely loved to drive. One night, Rod was out partying with friends. They shouldn't have been drinking, he shouldn't have been driving, and, as they were returning home, Rod pulled into oncoming traffic, totaling the Buick his dad had given him. He found a pay phone near the site of the accident and called home. When his father answered the phone he said, "Dad, I just wrecked the car."

Like any dad, His father quickly asked him if he was okay. Rod answered, "Yes. There are five of us and we've all been drinking." His dad asked him where they were, told them to stay put, and then came and picked them up. One by one, he drove Rod's friends to their homes. Then, his dad drove them back to their house.

Rosenblatt recalled, "When we finally arrived at home, we went into the private area of the living room. My father asked me how I was, and I replied, 'I'm shaking.' He said, 'That's shock. You will be fine.' At this point, I was in tears, realizing that what I had done was 'over the top' in anyone's book. My dad put his arm around my shoulders and said, 'You know what I think you need? I think you need

a new car. Why don't you go looking this week, see what you can find, and I'll take my lunch hour to come take a look, too.' And that was the end of the whole episode.”¹

We know who we are. We know what we've done. And if there's any doubt or ambiguity about these questions, God's Law clears it right up. We are as we confess, “poor, miserable sinners” who justly deserve God's temporal and eternal punishment. Yet, because of a completely incredible love that we can't begin to understand, Christ comes to us in our brokenness and shame not to exact punishment or prescribe penance, but to proclaim peace.

That's exactly what we see in today's first reading as Peter stands in the temple and announces to the crowd, “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.” Peter speaks to the very same people who begged Pilate to crucify Jesus, yet while his condemning words must have startled and frightened the people in the Temple, Peter proclaims peace: “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

So that your sins may be wiped out! So that times of refreshing may come from the Lord! My friends, that's what Christ came to do and that is what Easter means. Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* This Easter cheer speaks a word of life, instead of death. And in these words of proclamation, we have a promise for our future that changes the way we understand our life in the present.

Jesus said, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations” (Luke 24:46-47). This is the peace the disciples were given to proclaim to the world, and this is our message as well. Jesus died and He has risen, and now we have good news for the world that, in Christ Jesus, our sins are forgiven and we have a peace with God that will never end.

As parents, as friends, as brothers and sisters, in our homes, and in our hoods, we can say to every single person we meet in this world that Christ came for them, that Christ died for them, and that in His life they also will live. As Rod Rosenblatt once wrote, “Christianity is the story of a one-sided rescue that we didn't ask for, didn't deserve, and yet – in Jesus – God gave it to you anyway.”²

We have been rescued and we have been saved, not because we have been good sons and daughters, but because in Christ Jesus, our selfishness has been answered with sacrifice, our rebellion has been met with righteousness, and our death has been transformed into life. Jesus Christ is for you in every way and so today, you need not fear punishment and you don't have to worry about penance, because God has brought you peace in the truth that Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* Go with the peace of this promise God has made to you today, and all God's people say: Amen!

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¹ <https://www.1517.org/articles/rod-rosenblatt-a-great-storyteller-of-the-greatest-story-ever-told>

² Ibid