

Sermon 19th April 2009 – Holy Covenant

Scripture: John 20. 19-31

Psalm 133

Sermon Sentence: The risen Christ brings peace where there is fear and sends Holy Spirit in the power of the Holy Spirit, who crosses borders and breaks down barriers, to proclaim this kingdom of peace and unity.

As I thought about the gospel today, and Jesus breathing on the disciples the Holy Spirit... I thought of the sung response that we used to sing in the parish that I grew up in... we have tried it before and thought we would give it another go...

The Spirit in me greets the spirit in you, Hallelujah.

Response: **God's in us and we're in God, Hallelujah.**

She sits like a bird, brooding on the waters,
Hovering on the chaos of the world's first day;
She wings over earth, resting where she wishes,
Lighting close at hand or soaring through the skies;
She dances in fire, startling her spectators,
Waking tongues of ecstasy where dumbness reigned;
Nor can she be captured silenced or restrained.
For she is the Spirit, one with God in essence,
Gifted by the saviour in eternal love;
She is the key opening the scriptures,
Enemy of apathy and heavenly dove.
(John Bell)

God of freedom from fear, may the words of my lips and the meditation of all our hearts be now and always acceptable to you, Amen.

Do you remember Easter Sunday?

...God is on the loose. God is out of the box. God is moving... unrestrained... God is dancing, God is freeing.

Last week we heard the resurrection narrative from the gospel of Mark, we arrived at the tomb with the women, early in the morning. The stone had been rolled away. There was a man in a white robe seated at the right hand side, the place of honour, who exclaimed... DO NOT BE AFRAID.

He told us that Jesus had been raised from the dead, that he was on his way to Galilee...

He told the women to go and tell the disciples, and Peter, that he was on his way to the place where he said he would be.

From the tomb the women fled, afraid, terror and amazement had seized them... they remained silent... they told no one

(PAUSE)

Fear

(PAUSE)

This week we hear from the gospel of John, it is later on the same day. We arrive at the house, we take our place. The disciples and all those gathered are afraid. The doors are locked for fear of the Jews.

Imagine, Jesus has just been crucified, you too face persecution, you were a follower of this crucified one....

The air is heavy....

(PAUSE)

FEAR....

(PAUSE)

Suddenly Jesus is present here, alive, free.

And he says to these disciples, to us, "PEACE BE WITH YOU".

This same Jesus, who was tortured, beaten, crucified, comes back in peace, proclaiming peace, not divine retribution, not punishment, not fear, but peace.

(PAUSE)

"Peace be with you", Jesus says a second time to the gathered disciples: "Peace is with you. As the Father sent me so I send you."

After saying this Jesus breathed on them and said "Receive the Holy Spirit".

In their fear the disciples are greeted with peace, with peace they are sent, with the Holy Spirit they are sent...

They are sent with the same Holy Spirit of God who hovered over the chaos at the beginning of creation, the same Holy Spirit who spoke through the prophets, who dances in fire startling her spectators... the same Holy Spirit who cannot be captured, silenced, or restrained... The Spirit who is free, the God on the loose.

What are the implications of being sent in peace in the power of this Holy Spirit?

Let us come back now to this place, Holy Covenant,... Australia in the year 2009.

Fear is debilitating, stifling. Sometimes fear is irrational and yet the experience of it so real. Fear can breed division and unrest... the absence of peace.

What is the fear which keeps you imprisoned?

(PAUSE)

What walls do you build?

(PAUSE)

In the midst of all of this fear... wall building.... Division, and unrest...

Jesus comes to us and says "Peace be with you", Peace is with you.

And then he says, "I send you"....

We may recall here the baptismal vows, that, we as a church renew every year at Easter time...

"Will you each, by God's grace, strive to live as a disciple of Christ, loving God with your whole heart, and your neighbour as yourself, until your life's end?"

and we respond: **I will, with God's help**

Will you go?

Later in the service we will be sent, "Go in *Peace* to love and serve the Lord" **In the name of Christ, Amen...**

We are sent into a culture, of which we are a part, and in which *fear* is on the loose.

We hear talk of national security, borders, we see walls being built, people shut out, protection policies, defence... we live in a culture of fear and terror.

With this fear comes suspicion of what is other, suspicion of the unfamiliar.

We as Christians... have a theology (an understanding of God), the theology with which we are sent, that runs counter to this fearful ideology, indeed dangerous ideology.

And yet in many parts of the Church division is rampant.

We read the psalm today;

How good and lovely it is when Kindred live together in unity,
It is fragrant as oil upon the head,
that runs down over the beard:
fragrant as oil upon the beard of Aaron,
that ran down over the collar of his robe.
It is like the dew of Hermon:
like the dew that falls upon the hill of Zion.
For there the Lord has commanded his blessing:
Which is life evermore.

This psalm is not only talking about the unity of a family, a church, a nation, but all of God's people, and indeed we could add creation.

It is in unity or oneness that we experience more fully, life! It is in listening to difference that we learn most about ourselves.

We have a theology which calls us to peace with self, peace with neighbour, peace with God.

A theology which calls us to welcome the stranger, the refugee, the foreigner... remembering that in his life Jesus was at times all of these people....

We are sent with the Spirit of God who crosses all boundaries, who transforms, who breaths new life into fearful, stagnant, dry bones...

Both the psalm and the Gospel set for today end with the promise of life, fullness of life, life with God for evermore.

Life over death

Life overcoming fear

Life.

In light of the resurrection, Jesus' proclamation of peace, and being sent with the wild, "resting where she wishes" Spirit, no longer can the other be other, no longer can fear reign, no longer do we remain imprisoned...

Instead the Holy spirit of God is breathed upon us, twisting and weaving her way through that which is divided, so that we may be transformed and say instead, "We are the Body of Christ"; **"His Spirit is with us"**... "Peace be with you"... and we can say to each other; "the spirit in me greets the spirit in you" and, finally we say... "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord" That the world may know peace, and fullness of Life.