

“A Mother’s Gift” (i.e. the Holy Spirit)

John 20:19–23

Pentecost, Mother’s Day Sunday

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John 20:19–23

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Prayer.

Jesus came and stood among them.

Now, it seems to me that

- If Jesus was a fraud
- If Jesus had faked his death
- If Jesus had fooled the Roman and Jewish authorities
- If Jesus had successfully pulled the sleight of hand before the crowds

Then he would not have remained in hiding around Jerusalem. He would have been a fugitive, and making an exit to the nearest wilderness as soon as possible.

He didn’t. He remained right there in Jerusalem. So I don’t believe he was a fake, fraud, or fool. He came and stood among them. I believe that the only logical explanation to this phenomena is that Jesus suffered, died, and was risen from the dead. He incarnate body is resurrected, standing in their midst, filled with the mind, heart, and soul of God.

They had been locked in for fear of the Jews. Considering the recent events, of what the Jewish authorities had done to Jesus, we can understand the anxiety his disciples must have felt. They lashed Jesus; they are coming to rip our bodies to

shreds. They crucified Jesus; they are coming to nail us to a cross, too. "Lock the doors, Peter!"

He just appears. That's right, he appears out of nowhere. We can only guess the terror that must have held them, almost as if he was wearing a hockey mask and carrying a chain saw. Sure, Mary Magdalene returned from the grave shouting that he had risen, but, you know, consider the source. Dead people just don't come back to life. Or do they?

Over the course of the past three years, Jesus had recessitated a few in his time. We are told Jesus is said to have raised several persons from death, including the daughter of Jairus shortly after death, a young man in the midst of his own funeral procession, and Lazarus, who had been buried for four days. According to the Gospel of Matthew, after Jesus's resurrection, many of the dead saints came out of their tombs and entered Jerusalem, where they appeared to many.¹

One would think that his disciples would have become used to his practices.

"Peace," he extends, along with the supporting evidence ... his hands and his side. "Peace," he assures them again, if, for no other reason, than to quiet their rejoicing. Peace had become such a central facet of Jesus' character that this greeting fits him like an old pair of shoes.

There is no vengeance, no hatred, no retribution to be paid. There is no malice in his tone of voice or violence in future; only peace. The passion, suffering, and death have passed and need never to be revisited again. "My peace I give to you," Jesus had said in the 14th chapter of John, "not as the world gives, do I give to you."

The peace of our world is masculine. It is drawn up by men into elaborate documents and signed before television cameras and polite applause. The peace of our world is political, and therefore, it is only as good as the relationship of the two agreeing signatures.

But people come and go. Favor ebbs and flows. The body politic is powerless to the fads and whims of nationalistic fervor. No sooner is a treaty signed and troops are quelling rioting in the streets, soldiers are massed, and borders are breached. Earthly peace is temporary, unreliable, and fleeting.

¹ With thanks to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resurrection>

Jesus knows this, and is, therefore unsatisfied to leave his disciples to the mercy of earthly peace. Jesus has something far more superior in store. He knows that peace is more than the absence of violence, although it certainly includes this important character. Peace includes the unending and untiring effort to ensure perfect and equal justice under the law.

The peace of Jesus is feminine. It comes with the gentle gift of the Holy Spirit, the breath of God that fills our lungs. It is this eternal presence of Jesus, through his spirit, that brings eternal, lasting peace.

It seems very fitting that today, the day of Pentecost, when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, that it is also Mother's Day. There is no greater Mother's gift to the world than the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Wars may wage all around us, but they will never consume us, so long as we have the benefit of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the peace offered through communion with Him. Though we may die at the hands of a violent perpetrator, so long as we have the gift of the Spirit, we will have peace; perfect and eternal peace through him that loveth us.

It is said that the love of a mother never subsides or ends. It only deepens and grows throughout the years. I'm not suggesting that God has a gender, though I do believe that God is the god of all genders. What I am suggesting is that this divine peace is so central to the core of our God's values and beliefs that we are given the spirit of Jesus, just as those early church disciples witnessed, so that this enduring, sustained presence of Christ remains in the forefront of our beliefs and faith.

Maybe us men ought to let women rule the world, melt down all the warship and tanks, and make plowshares and pruning hooks. Maybe, even better, we come down from our high horse, swallow a little bit of our pride, give up some hubris, and let ourselves be led by the enduring, eternal presence of the Holy Spirit.

With the Spirit with us, and in us, we can be sent into all the world. We can become the channel for the eternal to be delivered to everyone else on the planet. We can become the means for God's peace, eternal peace, to be established on earth as it is in heaven.

On this Mother's Day, I know that the greatest gift worthy of a mother, is this gift that Jesus gives his disciples, the gift of his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, which is both present and future, unending, immortal, indivisible; the source of the only true and perfect peace God can offer to our world.

Amen.