



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Easter 6 (BCP 5 after Easter) 2019

Peace & Spirit 8.30 am & 11 am 2019

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The readings we hear through the Sundays that lead up to and then away from the time our Lord's Ascension, can seem something of a jumble.

Indeed, it would be an impossible and fruitless task even to try and form the readings into a seamless narrative or coherent and logical time sequence.

But common to all the readings is a twin promise made by Jesus: the first is that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Paraclete will to be poured out on the Church, and the second is, that Jesus will make a precious gift of peace.

It might seem that the two promised gifts have little in common.

The description of Pentecost in the book of the Acts of the Apostles describes a gathering like no other in recorded history, certainly one with no hint of any peace: the disciples gathered in the Upper Room experiencing something which can only be described as ‘rushing wind’ and ‘flames of fire’ – nothing very peaceful there.

But if we reflect a little more deeply, we come to see that the two gifts – the Holy Spirit and Christ’s peace, are perhaps one and the same gift.

The promised pouring out of God’s Spirit, is also the gift of God’s peace – the peace which defies understanding or description, the peace which so-filled the frightened and confused disciples that through it and in it and because of it they became the bold apostles who fearlessly spread the Good News of Jesus’ Resurrection throughout the then-known world.

For the disciples who had accompanied Jesus, peace had been a commodity in very short supply.

Wherever Jesus went, the crowds followed:

if they were hungry, they clamoured for food;

if they had children with them, parents pushed through the crowds and thrust their offspring at Jesus to be blessed;

if they were sick, they cried out to be healed;

and even those who mourned their dead begged Jesus to return their loved ones to life.

The disciples themselves were unable to do these things; it was Jesus whom the crowds wanted; his were the signs people wanted to see; his were the words they wanted to hear; his was the touch they wanted for themselves or those whom they loved.

But with Jesus no longer with them, how was the Kingdom to be proclaimed? Who was to heal the sick; who was to raise the dead; would proclaim liberty to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind?

And so it is, that, as the Risen Lord prepares to take his final bodily leave of the disciples, Jesus promises them a gift: the twin gift of his Spirit and his peace – two sides of a single coin, if you like.

The Spirit who will bring to mind all that Jesus has said and done during his years with them; the Spirit who will lead them into fuller, richer, deeper truth; the Spirit who will equip them with the words to use when they are dragged before kangaroo courts and councils braying for their blood; the Spirit who will fill them with such power that they will travel thousands of miles by land and by sea to make Jesus known – so that others might also know this peace, also know God's Holy Spirit with them.

But the peace which Jesus promises and gives to his disciples and to the Church as it grows, is not a peace that is simply the absence of noise or conflict, the tranquil sort of peace holiday companies try to sell packaged in luxury, pool-side villas or on palm-fringed deserted beaches, but a peace which is far beyond the everyday world's comprehension; a peace which enfolds hearts and minds into that unity of love which has been revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the deep eternal peace from which the universe has been spoken into being, and to which it will ultimately return; a peace which alone can banish fear, no matter what form it takes; a peace which holds in perfect love those to whom the Son gives it.

It would have been cruel, obscene, if the peace Jesus offered to his disciples was a passive, disengaged, quietness, for very soon after his Ascension not only would the disciples find themselves thrown out of their homes and their synagogues, but they would find themselves driven out of Jerusalem, scattered across the Roman world and beyond, arrested, tortured, murdered - and all in the name of the one whom the angels had announced as the Prince of Peace.

No, the peace which Jesus promises to his disciples, the peace he promises to us now, is the gift of the Holy Spirit; the peace of the One who bears in his body the marks of the nails and the spear and, on his head, the scars of a crown fashioned from thorns.

This is a peace which can never be bought, or achieved or manufactured; it is the peace which is perfect gift to be received; the gift of a deep inner peace, which does not depend on outward circumstance or environment, but solely on the One who gives it – Jesus, the wounded, crucified, risen, ascended and glorified Prince of Peace.

As we approach our Lord's Ascension and look beyond to Pentecost, we pray to be open to receive these twin gifts of Holy Spirit and peace; the peace which allows the Holy Spirit free reign in the lives of those who receive it; the peace which really does pass all understanding; the peace which alone keeps hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God - no matter where the Spirit leads.

So, come Holy Spirit and fill us with your peace. Alleluia!