

**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2021**  
**Glynde Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon on John 20:19 – 23**  
**Theme: “Peace through forgiveness”**  
*by Pastor Richard Haar*

---

Let's start with clearing up a little bit of Australian social etiquette. When someone says to you, “**How's it going?**” or its variant “**How you're going?**” What is the appropriate reply to this? [Any suggestions?]

The commonly acceptable responses are: (1) “Fine”; (2) “Good”; (3) “Great” – if you're having a particularly good day; or even (4) “Never better!” used by the super confident optimists amongst us.

What people are **not** expecting (or wanting, for that matter) is for you to take them at their word and to actually tell them how you are going! And if you do tell them how you're going, they'll probably act quite surprised. The reason for this is that the greeting, “How're going” has lost its literal meaning. What it **really** means is simply, “**Hello.**” It's a kind of **throwaway expression** that has been emptied of all its meaning.

A similar process has occurred when Australians say, “**Good bye.**” This originally was a contraction of the parting blessing, “God be with you.” But now it functions merely as a way of saying farewell. What a pity that we no longer use it as a short prayer of blessing when we leave.

OK, why this discussion about greetings? Simply because when the risen Jesus first appeared to the disciples, he spoke the typical Jewish greeting of “**Peace be with you.**” Now my question for you is this: Was Jesus just saying “Hello” here – the Middle Eastern equivalent of “How's it going?” Or was there more to this than just that?

It's interesting to note how all the resurrection accounts in the New Testament begin with either the angels at the empty tomb or Jesus himself saying something like, “Don't be afraid”, “Don't be alarmed”, “Be at peace.”

Why is that? There are a number of different aspects to this. **First** of all, dead people are not in the habit of coming back to life. So if you were to

meet someone who had come back from the dead, most of us would understandably feel pretty scared.

So Jesus' greeting here is first and foremost about reassuring his disciples that it's OK and that they don't need to be afraid.

But there's **something else** going on here as well. Something deeper. Remember how the last time that the disciples had seen Jesus, they had let him down and deserted him in his hour of need. And now Jesus has unexpectedly turned up. What is Jesus going to say to them? Will he chastise them for their disloyalty and weakness? Will he send them on a huge guilt trip? Will he reject them or punish them? They certainly deserved it!

But **no!** Jesus did none of these. Instead, Jesus directly addresses the disciples' guilty feelings and speaks his peace over them. His greeting is actually a merciful word of **forgiveness** and **restoration**. He's not merely saying, "Hello" and he's doing much more than encouraging them to not be afraid. He is bringing them **freedom** from their guilty conscience; **healing** of their relationship with him; and **reassurance** of his love and acceptance.

Note that the power of this greeting comes from **the One** who speaks it: the risen Saviour. In fact, Jesus is **himself** our peace.

So at its **deepest** level, these words, "Peace be with you" are the embodiment of the Gospel itself. This is the Easter message in a nutshell: the crucified and risen Lord Jesus has brought about **peace** between God and sinful humanity - **peace** between God and us here today! The risen Lord comes to us today, not to condemn us but to speak words of mercy, forgiveness, acceptance, restoration, and new life.

To make this clear, the word "peace" effectively means "**salvation**" itself. Furthermore, Jesus' words are not merely a greeting, ultimately they are a **gift**. They are a gift that God speaks over all of us today: "**Peace** be with you." "**Forgiveness** be with you." "**Acceptance** be with you." "**Salvation** be with you!"

For in Jesus, you have **peace with God** and, through that, a wonderful **inner peace** that is marked by a clear conscience, the peace that comes from knowing that your sins have been forgiven.

The Hebrew word for peace is “Shalom.” Shalom means wholeness and a sense of oneness and connectedness. One biblical scholar describes Shalom as “Human flourishing.”

So “Peace be with you” means: “In Jesus, **flourish** under God – be all you were created to be, find wholeness, and healing and joy in the risen Jesus!”

“Peace be with you” means: “In Jesus, know that you are **fully forgiven, greatly loved, and completely accepted** by God!”

“Peace be with you” means: “Know that through faith in Jesus, you are **saved** and that, united with the risen Jesus, you too will **conquer death and live with God forever!**”

This is **no** throwaway, empty greeting! Instead, this is full of meaning and has tremendous significance: The risen Lord has conquered sin and death for us and he brings us his **healing peace**. And because of that, our lives are completely changed.

It’s kind of mind blowing that **all this** is included in what, at first, seemed a simple greeting. But wait, there’s **even more!**

A **second time** in verse 21 Jesus repeats his greeting, “Peace be with you.” This time it’s in connection with his call for us to share his love, forgiveness, and peace with others.

There’s a couple of extremely important things for us to note here: **Firstly**, as we’ve already seen, peace and forgiveness are intimately connected. Our peace with God and our inner peace, are both grounded in the forgiveness that Jesus won for us on the cross. And now Jesus is sending us out into the world with this same message of peace and forgiveness, that has been spoken over our own lives.

We have the wonderful privilege of acting as channels of God’s love, peace, and forgiveness to the people around us, **starting** with those who are the nearest and dearest to us – our spouses, children, grand-children, parents and grandparents, siblings and cousins and members of our wider family – as well as our friends and neighbours.

We **also** have the privilege of reassuring our fellow Christians here at Glynde that God does indeed love them, forgive them, and accept them in Jesus.

And if that weren't enough, we **also** have the privilege [although admittedly it's a bit more scary to do!], the **privilege** of also telling people who **don't** know Jesus, who Jesus is and what he's done to save them. To let them know that God truly cares about them and wants them to experience his love and help in life. That he wants them to share in his kingdom and to live forever with him.

The **second** point to take from these verses comes into play right here. Telling others about Jesus is unquestionably an honourable and glorious task, but it's one, that if we're real honest, we're **not** quite up to. And it's **good** that we both recognise and admit that we **can't** do this on our own. Jesus knows that too. Which is precisely why he breathes the Holy Spirit over the disciples – because they weren't up to the task on their own either.

And for us too, Jesus pours his Spirit in us, to both **motivate** and **empower** us to be his witnesses; to help us to both speak **and to live out** his Gospel of forgiveness in the Church, in our homes, and in the world.

One final thought: A little later in the service, when we receive Holy Communion, we will hear Jesus say to each of us, "Peace be with you!" As he gives himself to us through the bread and wine, we will hear him speak over our lives his peace, and forgiveness, and love, and acceptance. So when you hold the wafer in your hand and put the cup up to your lips, **listen** to Jesus saying to you personally, "Peace be with you!" **Hear** him say to you, "I love you and I forgive you, and it's going to be alright."