



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Easter 3

April 14, 2024

Life in the City of God

Luke 24:36–49

³⁶As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” ³⁷But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate before them.

⁴⁴Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

Dear citizens of Jerusalem, the city of peace in Christ. He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Yes, you have indeed come to the City of Peace that is Christ's church.

Outward appearances may not look that way, but what does Jesus say?

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth,” Jesus said. “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household” (Mat. 10:34-36).

Peace is not something that comes naturally to sinners, which is precisely why Jesus Himself stood among these frightened, skeptical men and said to them, "Peace be with you."



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“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul [and every pastor], became a minister” (Col. 1:19-23).

God takes those who are not His people and makes them His people, which is the only way He’s determined to have people. You don’t make yourself a child of God; He makes you His child by grace through faith in Christ.

Jerusalem – literally, *Teaching of Peace* – was founded, Scripture tells us, by the Amorites and Hittites [Ezk. 16:3,45], who were enemies of the Israelites. It was eventually given to the Children of Israel as part of the Promised Land, which God had to sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them. Over the course of the centuries, it became known to God’s people as the “City of Peace.”

Here’s the point: Just as Jerusalem, once a pagan city, but which became The City of Peace by the transformative power of God, Easter, the name we give the highest Holy Day of the Church, comes from the name of a false god – the Canaanite “goddess” of fertility (Ashtera) – but has been transformed and given a new, everlasting meaning by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And so, we too, beloved. We, who were born pagans and enemies of God, have been transformed by the redeeming power of God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul quotes the prophet Hosea:

“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’ ” “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God’ ” (Rom. 9:25-26).

From the city, then, founded by the enemies of the One true God, comes the salvation of all; from a pagan festival founded on the worship of a false god, God makes a true holy day, celebrating Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life; and from individual enemies of God, He makes a people to call His own.

“As [his disciples] were talking about [the appearance of the risen Jesus to the Emmaus disciples], Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, ‘Peace to you!’ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, ‘Why are



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you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled’” (vv. 36-44).

“Peace,” He said to them. “I’m not a ghost. Touch me. I didn’t come to deceive. A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” He says the same to us, by the way, in Holy Communion, does He not? His true body and true blood are given us Christians to eat and to drink. Not merely a spiritual reality, but a true flesh and blood reality.

“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high’” (vv. 45-49).

Peace and forgiveness of sins begins here in Jerusalem, the city of God’s chosen people. Here in the church, the gathering of His chosen people, sinners are forgiven.

And this is the only way and the only message by which people can be saved.

As we heard in our reading from the book of Acts, “What God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago” (Acts 3:18-21).

And as we shall hear next week, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

And Paul, writing again to the Romans, says, “Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved’” (Romans 9:27).

John, in today’s Epistle, writes: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him” (1 John 3:1).



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This is the message Jesus sent out with His disciples, and it's the message He sends us out with today. If we want others to know this message – and shame on us if we don't – then we must start by identifying ourselves as what we are: sinners, pagans, residents of the unbelieving world, who have been cleansed, forgiven, and made residents of Jerusalem, the City of Peace, by the righteousness given us in Jesus, the Son of the living God.

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but for the sins of the whole world. And we are witnesses of these things. Ones who have seen, experienced, and now share this good news that comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. And, more than this, we are those whose life comes from dying with Christ and living by His Word alone.

You people of God at Trinity, you are witnesses of this wonderful thing. While you are surrounded by a hostile world, even still, your Lord comes to you today to give you Life in the City of Peace, forgiving you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

My dear citizens of Jerusalem, the City of Peace in Christ – He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Let us pray:

Lord God, merciful Father, grant the increase of Your peace through the lives of Your citizens, whom you have called to faith in the forgiveness of sins, and whom You now send out into the world as messengers of Your peace. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen