

**St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church, Modesto, California**  
**The Third Sunday of Easter**  
**Hebrews 13:7-9a, 20, 21**  
**April 10, 2005**

*Sermon by Pastor Jonathan Micheel*

**Hebrews 13:7-9a, 20, 21**

*Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.*

*May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Dear brothers and sisters of our risen Lord,

Once in a while, a nightmare scenario runs through my head. It's Sunday morning. I get up and get ready for church. I arrive here and start greeting people. A few minutes before the service begins, I go back into the sacristy to put on my vestments. Pastor Janke is there, and he says something like, "After you finish your sermon today, could you make an announcement?" And I say, "My sermon? It's my turn to preach the sermon? I thought it was yours." He shakes his head "No" with a grave look on his face. And I gulp as the bell begins to ring.

Can you relate to that? Do you ever have those panicked thoughts about being completely unprepared or unequipped for something? There are a thousand variations. In school, there's the "you sit down in your desk and your teacher hands out a big test and you forgot to study" situation. In your job/career situation, you can probably imagine some. As a parent, there are a host of possibilities. Whatever the situation, it's scary to find yourself unequipped to handle something.

The theme for our services in the next two weeks is "Proclaim Peace through Jesus." It's a reflection of the amazing task that our Lord gives to all Christians. He commissions us to tell the people of the world that God has made peace with them. But that amazing task can also seem like a supremely daunting one. Maybe you've even found yourself frozen and tongue-tied when trying to talk to someone about Christianity. Maybe you've felt that nervous, ill-equipped feeling.

But God doesn't want us to be frozen with nervousness when we have the chance to proclaim peace through Jesus. So he equips us to do it. He reassures us of that through these words first written to struggling Christians in the First Century. Today, let's be encouraged by the fact that **GOD EQUIPS US TO PROCLAIM PEACE THROUGH JESUS.**

## **God's equipment is powerful**

All this talk of peace may seem out of place. Peace does not come naturally for this world, a world of war, hatred and hostility. And all these things, as horrifying as they are, are symptoms of a darker and deadlier problem: The world is a wild, rebellious place, because the world is at war with God. People rob themselves of peace with God, because they want to go on fighting against their Maker. They want to do things their way instead of God's way. People deprive themselves of peace in their hearts, because their relationship with God is broken. They look for peace in pills: pop a pill and feel better. They seek peace in prosperity, thinking that money will buy them the peace and security they seek. They invent a peace and imagine that things are fine with God. They create their own religion that is based on human ideas and notions and has nothing to do with the truth of Scripture, and they say, "Peace, peace," but there is no peace.

You know about this hostility. You've been there. You were yourself once an enemy of God, warring and raging against your Creator. You and I were dead in transgressions and sins, in which we lived when we followed Satan. God's peace was once nowhere to be found in our lives. What's more, we did not have the desire to change things, nor did we have the capability to change things.

But God did. God wanted to be at peace with people. Why? Why would God the creator want to go out of his way to make peace with the frail creatures who were so full of themselves, creatures who rebelled against him constantly? All we can say is that he wanted to. God loves people, he loves the world, he loves you and me. He wanted to be at peace with us.

God also had the capability to make peace. Now, someone might say to that, "Sure God had the capability to make peace. He could have decided just to give people a pass on all their sins, just let them go." But I'd have to object to that. God is unswervingly just. He can't let crimes against him go unpunished. He can't ignore our sins; they must be dealt with. So here's what God planned and carried out: the writer to the Hebrews calls it "the blood of the eternal covenant." God made a covenant with the human race—we might think of it as a peace treaty. In this treaty he declared that sins have been dealt with. They have been paid for and punished. The punishment was in blood—someone gave up his life. The someone was Jesus. He took our sins on himself and shed his blood on the cross to pay for them. Then God the Father raised him from the dead, telling the world that no further payment for sin was necessary. In essence, God signed a peace treaty with the world and signed it in the blood of his Son.

There is only one thing that changed your heart and mine: it was the powerful message of the gospel of forgiveness. It was peace through Jesus that brought us back into a right relationship with God and transformed us from God's enemies into God's children.

That, dear friends, is the powerful equipment that the Lord Jesus gives you to use, as he now calls you to proclaim the peace of Jesus. God has given you the same powerful message of peace that brought you from death to life. It is the word, dear Christians, the powerful, pride-crushing, soul-transforming word of God that the Lord now places on your lips. It is the message of God's peace with the world. It is the gospel of forgiveness bought with the blood of Jesus. It is the beautiful truth that God's holy Son lived for the world under the law, suffered for our sins, was crucified, was died and buried, and with his innocent death has paid the price for our rebellion. The powerful

gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. The gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to transform those who hear it.

This is the powerful equipment with which God equips you and me as we head out into our own personal mission fields to proclaim peace through Jesus. It is the same powerful word that has rescued us. It is this powerful gospel on your lips that rescues your hearers, as you proclaim peace through Jesus. May the God of peace who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will (Hebrews 13:20).

### **God's equipment is practical**

The thing about equipment is that it wears out or it becomes obsolete. I remember when I was a kid, my dad would make the bulletins for each Sunday. The equipment he needed for that? An AB Dick brand mimeograph machine. Any of you remember those? They were messy, inky, unreliable machines—kind of recent ancestors of copy machines. He would type out the master copy on his manual typewriter—make a mistake, too bad, unless you wanted to start all over. Some of you don't even know what I'm talking about, do you? Which is my point. The equipment that we use—after a while, it's just not practical anymore.

Is that true for the equipment God gives us? The message he puts on our lips—is it obsolete? Is something that was useful for our moms and dads but just isn't practical anymore?

The writer to the Hebrews says something interesting: "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7). He urges us to imitate those in the past who have announced the peace of God to us. No hint here that this message is no longer practical. The apostles spoke it. Their spiritual descendants spoke it. Our forefathers spoke it. And we speak it. Still works. Still practical. That word of peace from God actually brought peace to people in the First Century. It still does in the Twenty-first Century.

The thing that makes the message of peace practical is that Jesus himself is working through it. Each time it's shared, Jesus is there, bringing the benefit of his blood, the blood of the eternal covenant, to the one who hears. Every person in the world needs this peace with God. And the message of peace through the blood of Christ is for everyone. Listen again to Hebrews: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teaching (Hebrews 13:8,9a).

Another thing that makes this message so practical is its simplicity. Christianity is based upon simple, historical facts. You recite those foundational truths of our faith every time you recite the Apostles' Creed: Jesus was conceived, he was born, he suffered, was crucified, died and buried; he descended into hell, rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father and will come again to judge the world. The message is so simple that even little children can proclaim it. The kids of our school and preschool have done that already this morning, and beautifully. As far as I know, none of them has a seminary degree. But often—maybe you have seen this too—little kids are the best witnesses, as they tell us from the heart about the Savior who loves them and whom they love.

Nevertheless, you and I might find that we are timid when it comes to talking about our faith. We're afraid that we might meet rejection. Someone might ask a question we don't feel qualified to answer. We might earn the reputation of being Bible thumpers who wear our religion too much on our sleeves. Friends, there's only one thing that gears us up, overcomes our fears and equips us to proclaim peace through Jesus. It is the word of God that works in our hearts. It is the gospel in the Holy Sacrament that feeds our faith. Through God's powerful forgiveness in word and sacrament, you and I are strengthened practically for our task. Hebrews tells us, "It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace" (Hebrews 13:9a).

Maybe someday that nervousness about stepping into the pulpit ill-equipped will go away. Maybe not. I suppose it's good to keep me humble and to goad me when it's sermon preparation time.

Maybe the nervousness we feel when we talk about Jesus will never go away completely. But Jesus won't go away either. He will always be there, giving us the peace that only he can give. And he will be there giving us his strength, too—strength to use opportunities he gives us to proclaim peace through Jesus.

*May the God of peace who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will* (Hebrews 13:20). Amen.