Easter 2: Castlemacadam 150th Anniversary Service April 24th 2022

Acts 5.27-32; St John 20.19-31

St John 20.19: *… Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you…*

Today’s Gospel carries on where the Gospel of last Sunday, Easter Day, left off. In the telling of St John, we move very quickly from The Empty Tomb to two meetings of Jesus with his disciples in quick succession, one in an upper room on the same day as the resurrection and another in an upper room on the same day one week later. In this way we find ourselves with the creation of the Christian Sunday which, as we all know, is a gathering and a celebration of the resurrection at any and every time of the year. So important is resurrection in our understand of why we do what we do. Our own picture of the resurrection moves forward rather quickly, therefore. There is no delay. There is no sentimentality.

At the heart of these meetings, there is something important to St John that he wants to get across to his readers again and again and in rapid quick-fire succession. It is that the Risen Lord Jesus comes to bring peace. He does this with Mary, he does this with the disciples when Thomas is not there and he does this with Thomas very specifically when Thomas shows up a week later, angry with himself and with everyone else because he missed out the week before. And so, the ways in which Jesus unfolds, discloses, shares resurrection is by bringing peace to individual and to community alike, female and male, however fearful, distraught or distracted any of them may be.

As the Greeting in The Peace expresses it ringing throughout The Season of Easter:

*The Risen Christ came and stood among his disciples and said, Peace be with you. Then were they glad when they saw the Lord.* St John 20.19, 20.

The gift of peace is indeed to be cherished and it is to be nurtured and garnered. We seek peace today as perhaps never before in the lifetime of our own generation with the brutality of warfare in The Ukraine, with millions of women and children dispersed across the world and separated from their menfolk who have no option but to stay and fight. Having just emerged from the deepest and starkest Lockdown known to any of us through the ravages of Covid-19, we now find ourselves to be spectators in the arena of war, with instant communications so sophisticated as never before known, that we see atrocities as they happen; and also we are responders to human tragedy and helplessness such that we never expected to happen in a sophisticated and civilized Europe in 2022. Peace is more than the absence of war. Peace is a state of settled living that enables young and old to flourish without fear of their own destruction and that enables the common good to be much more than the quest for raw survival or trying in vain to secure dignified burial for the dead. On this 150th anniversary of this very fine church Holy Trinity, Castlemacadam, we stand in this moment of world history. We stand also in a further moment of history, very immediate and very important to us, remembering with thanksgiving all of those who have come in the generations before us along with their contributions to the life of this church and its community and the gift of peace within which we live and which, not unreasonably, we take as something to be expected today. What we experience in world history now shows us that it can change in an instant. We can no longer say: It could never happen to us. It can happen anywhere.

There is every good reason to expect that there has been a church in this area, on this site, since 1430. This is a truly wonderful thing to be able to say and to celebrate. The church as a living and a sharing community of people, knit together within the love of God the Holy Trinity, carries on throughout and in the face of political events, regardless of wars and rumours of wars; and for countless generations, the church has offered a constancy and a stability in the lives of so many people in joy and in sorrow. Events affect its working. Events do not distort its purpose. The church heralds God’s presence and God’s people in the world. The church responds to new needs in new and imaginative ways. This succession of church buildings has stood majestically in the legendary Vale of Avoca where three rivers come together: The Avonbeg, The Avonmore and The Avoca Rivers. What is still referred to as The New Church was built from the generosity and the affection of parishioners and other contributors along with a grant from The Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1872. And so, we have the fine church that stands to this day as a testimony to generosity and devotion and in the service of God Almighty.

What might the peace that is the gift of Jesus Christ to his church look like as we mark and celebrate 150 years of this church building? I focus on peace at the same time as I congratulate those who worship in this church today on a building that is kept in fine decorative order and maintenance; it is these same people who maintain and develop the life and the fabric of this church today for this generation and for future generations. We do so grateful for peace because peace is something that very often we recognize only when it is gone, as is the tragic fate of the people of Ukraine at this very moment. I suggest three ways of describing peace.

Peace can be described as *harmony*. Harmony is not unison. Harmony is the blending and the mingling of sounds and chords and voices that are different and yet their totality makes a more pleasant sound than any one of their parts. And so it is, and needs to be, in the life of a parish: different voices, different practicalities, different skills, different people who, through sharing a common goal and a common God, come together to a peace that takes us beyond survival into service of our neighbours. Peace expresses itself as interconnection and as humility when a community of relationship is formed over and over and people are knit together in one communion and fellowship, as The Collect for All Saints’ Day expresses it.

Peace can be described as *relationships*. These relationships are what lie within and behind the harmony that we have identified as being part and parcel of peace. We all know what good relationships look like and, therefore, we also know what bad relationships look like. The peace of which we speak is the heartbeat of Christian community because it flows from the person of Jesus Christ like living water, because it is the gift of Christ Risen and because peace connects a Christian community that might so easily be tempted to look inwards instead to look outwards. Peace connects us with a bigger canvas and with a wider world. It is to this wider world that our church, and indeed any church, needs to look and from which it can learn as well as to which it can contribute. Peace expresses itself as adventure and responsibility.

Peace can be described as *ecology.* Strange though it may sound, this is simply a continuation of what we have already said about relationships with the world. While people have for generations ridiculed the account of creation given in the first chapter of The Book Genesis, modern understanding of climate damage points us back to the need for Christian people to grasp our need to respect the harmony and the relationships of creation; to honour the parts of the creation which we had conditioned ourselves to see as at our service and beneath us in a chain of who and what really matters. Not only has David Attenborough, for example, contributed to the proper understanding; so also have the ravages of Covid-19 shown us that we are not invincible to the unknown and to the unseen. Ecology has to do with justice; and justice is another expression of peace.

Today’s celebration has helped us through the Scripture to see more of the lie of the land in the church that we celebrate as part of our identity in The Body of Christ. Each generation gets the chance to shape the inheritance not in its own image but in the image of God as reflected in the people of God and the people of the world and of the world itself. It is our privilege and our duty to read the signs, to shape the policies and to make the movements towards peace in its broadest sense. I congratulate parishioners, younger and older, and rejoice to be with you on this happy day. This is a day when together we give thanks to God for Castlemacadam Parish; for the people of the past, the present and the future; for the children and the older people and for everyone in between; for the gift of peace which still is the gift of The Holy Trinity to the church.

Acts 5.31, 32: *God exalted Jesus at his right hand as leader and saviour, to grant Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to all this, as is the Holy Spirit who is given by God to those obedient to him.*