

As they were talking about these things, Jesus Himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!”

I. The Risen Jesus Takes His Stand Among His Disciples

Today’s Gospel reading takes us back to the evening of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Word is getting around about His open and empty tomb. Women have witnessed the angels’ announcement, “He is not here, but has risen.” Mary Magdalene has spoken with Jesus. Simon Peter has seen Jesus. Two men have walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Now His followers are gathered in confusion, wonder and amazement.

Suddenly, Jesus Himself stands among them. A dead body cannot stand. A corpse cannot remain upright. Truly Jesus is alive! Jesus has risen from the dead! Jesus has come into the midst of His faithful followers. Even though they had deserted Him when He was arrested, and even though they had not remembered those words of His prophecy that He would be betrayed, crucified and then raised from the dead, Jesus has come to them, but not to scold or punish them.

Quite the opposite, Jesus comes to them bringing His peace, the peace of God’s forgiveness which Jesus won for the world by His sacrificial suffering and death upon the cross. Jesus comes to them bringing peace, the peace of a restored relationship with our Creator and heavenly Father which Jesus has earned for us by defeating death and devil through His resurrection from the dead. Jesus comes to them bringing peace, the peace of a life that has no end, lived without sin and in the glory and majesty of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

II. Martin Luther Makes His Stand Among the Emperor and Princes

Over the following centuries of Christian history, that peace was taken away from the people of God and replaced with rules and regulations they needed to follow in order to earn saving merit in God’s sight. If they were not able to save themselves by their own good works, cold, hard cash paid to the church bought forgiveness for their own sins. Such indulgences also could promote a dead loved one out of a shadowy afterlife into the glory of a heavenly home. The peace that Jesus had won for the world fully and freely now was sold by His church to its members for pieces of gold and silver.

On this date 500 years ago, an Augustinian monk and theology professor from the University of Wittenberg stood before the Holy Roman Emperor and assembled princes of the empire at their meeting in the German city of Worms. With His 95 Theses, Martin Luther had dared to challenge the church’s practice of selling God’s forgiveness. In the 3 ½ years since, His study of the Bible moved him to point out other errors that had become part of the church’s teaching and worship. Already

declared a heretic and excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church by Pope Leo X, Luther now is commanded by the state to recant, or take back, his writings on the Christian faith. The emperor's representative challenges him, "Do you or do you not recant your books and the errors in them?" If Luther were to recant and admit that he was wrong, all would be well before the emperor and the Church and he would leave the city a free man. On the other hand, if he sticks to what he believes and has written and does not recant, his own life would be at risk. He would become the state's Public Enemy #1 with no legal protection left for his life.

Luther answers his accuser, "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen."

III. We Make Our Stand Among the Unbelieving World

We are the modern-day disciples of Jesus, forgiven saints of God and students of Reformation theology. As we live in the confession of our risen Lord Jesus Christ, we probably will not be hauled into a government courtroom and told to recant our faith in Jesus (at least, not yet). But we are on a regular, even daily, basis dragged before the court of unbelieving public opinion. Will we give in to the ways of the world around us? Will we succumb to peer pressure and follow the desires of our sinful natures? Will we accept the arguments and agree with the encouragement to forget what's right and to engage in what we know from God's Word is wrong?

Or will we stand on the truths of God's Word and follow its holy will and good guidance for our lives? Will we resist the temptations of our old nature and display the holiness of our new nature which God's Spirit works in us through our baptism? Will we show the world by our words and works that God's way is good, right and beneficial for our lives? We can and we will do so as long as we remain with our risen Lord Jesus Christ who still stands living among us through His Word & Sacraments.

Today, we stand in the footsteps of Martin Luther 500 years later. We stand boldly, proclaiming the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. We stand boldly, renouncing the devil and all his works and all his ways. We stand, by the grace of God, steadfast and ready to suffer all rather than fall away. We do not stand on Luther, but we will gladly stand with him, firm on the testimony of the Holy Scriptures to confess the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ who died and rose, in whose name is the forgiveness of sins for all people. Here we stand; we can do no other. God help us. Amen