

“Peace and Life”

If the reports turn out to be true – that the Chinese Communist Party is guilty of trying to cover up the coronavirus outbreak, rather than acknowledging it and seeking help to contain it – can you imagine the position that would put them in?

They would be the source of the pandemic, and the cause of much unnecessary suffering and death. Governments around the world would have something to hold over their heads – a tremendous bargaining chip – a valid reason to impose sanctions, or demand that all debts held by the Chinese government be forgiven.

We know what that’s like – having something to hold over someone else’s head (spouse, co-worker, opponent). Of course, you’ve been on the other side of it as well – when you’ve sinned against someone – and they know it. You don’t have a leg to stand on – you are at their mercy – you cower like a dog before the alpha male.

Can you imagine what it was like for the disciples – already locked behind doors for fear of the Jews – and then Jesus shows up in the middle of the room? Can you imagine the temptation there would be for revenge – if you were in Jesus’ shoes?

These disciples had scattered at the first threat of danger, abandoning you. Judas who betrayed you with a kiss is not here – but Peter is, who also used his mouth to deny you. Even though they’d all made great boasts about never falling away from you – in the end, You endured horrendous suffering, pain and agony alone.

While we could imagine the disciples cowering in fear at the sight of Jesus – the Scripture simply says that Jesus showed them His hands and side, and that they “were glad when they saw the Lord.” The focus shifts to Jesus – to what He says and does. Not, “You boys are going to get it now!” – but rather – “Peace be with you.”

Rather than revenge, Jesus releases them from the bondage of their sin. Rather than stoking fear, He gives them peace. And more than that – not only are they forgiven – they are to be His chosen instruments. I don’t know about you – but if I were in Jesus’ shoes – I’d probably looked for other, better, more faithful, instruments.

But Jesus doesn't react like we do. "My kingdom is not of this world," He says. His rule is unlike that of any of the kingdoms of this world. He doesn't consider how He can make the most of the situation for His own benefit. He doesn't rule by asking, "What's in it for me?" He rules and reigns over all things – for your benefit.

Listen to how He rules in His kingdom. "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.'"

That is what His kingdom is all about – setting sinners free from their sin so that they might live. His kingdom is one of grace and mercy – not revenge and retribution. Jesus comes to forgive sinners – so that they might have peace.

That is what His Church is all about – forgiving sin. That's why He sends the Apostles out – to forgive sins in His stead and by His command. That is why His Gospel comes in many ways – by the preached Word, in Holy Baptism, in His Absolution, in the Lord's Supper, and when Christians console one another with His forgiveness. The Gospel may come by a variety of means – but it is always the Gospel of Christ setting sinners free from the bondage of their sin.

The Kingdom of God is all about the forgiveness of sins – but I warn you – God is no pacifist, no pansy when it comes to sin. Don't think the things you have said and done to hurt and harm others – hardly catches God's eye. Don't take His grace and mercy for granted – living in your sin – because God will just forgive it anyway.

"If you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld." To the unrepentant, unbelieving ones – who want to live as if it were unnecessary for Jesus to die as the ransom for their sin – their sin is bound to them. It is not taken away. It is not forgiven.

What does this mean? It means that all that Jesus went through because of your sin – is now yours to suffer. Either He suffers and dies in your place, FOR YOU – or, you endure it all yourself. When you say, "No thanks Jesus, I will not trust in you for my forgiveness, life and salvation – it will not end well FOR YOU.

Dearly beloved, God grant you His Holy Spirit – that you may see the harm you have brought to your neighbor, the suffering and death you have brought on your Lord, Jesus Christ – and repent. For all the times you have held the sins of others over their heads – refusing to be merciful, refusing to forgive – repent, and trust in the grace and mercy of your Savior, Jesus Christ.

Your Savior Jesus Christ comes into the midst of you today – with all the rule and might of His Kingdom – ruling over you by His Word. And what is His Word to you? “Peace be with you.” Your sins are forgiven. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.