

PEACE<sup>1</sup>

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'PEACE be upon you.' Our Lord's greeting to his disciples after his resurrection from the dead is one of *peace*: for a new life has begun for all who believe in him, a life of peace. The old conflicts are over, the war is won; man is restored to God's friendship, he is reconciled, redeemed. And this is the work of Christ our Lord: he has triumphed over sin and death through his own dying, and the barriers that separated men from God are broken down, the barriers of sin which no merely human power could ever destroy. And peace begins: the peace of Christ himself communicated now to all whom he has redeemed.

But the peace that our Lord brings to man is very different from the peace that is so often on men's lips, the peace that is simply the absence of conflict, an interval between wars. His peace, he tells us, is his legacy to those who believe in him—'My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. . . . But not as the world gives . . .'. And during the days that remain before his ascension into heaven, when his work on earth will be over, he instructs his disciples in the meaning of this new life of peace which he has made available to men. He must return to the Father, but yet he remains with us as long as time lasts—'I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world'—but only if we believe in him: he who is the Eternal Word of God, the Truth itself.

So it is that our Lord's greeting of 'Peace' to his disciples is at once followed by a compelling lesson in what the possession of that peace must really mean. To Thomas, who disbelieves, he shows the very wounds of his dying, the very proof of our redemption. And Thomas cried out, 'My Lord and my God!'; all doubt is over, for here most plainly are the marks of God's love—his Son has died that we may live now, not any life but his own life communicated and given to us through Christ our Lord. All doubt is over—yet it is those who have *not* seen and have believed, says our Lord, who are blessed. All the generations of

<sup>1</sup> The substance of an address broadcast from Hawkesyard Priory on the General Overseas Service by the B.B.C. on 16th May, 1954.

men and women who are to come after, baptized into the Body of Christ, made sharers in his death and resurrection—it is they who are blessed, it is they who are promised peace. And that is because they *believe*; because they accept God's truth on God's own word, not in their heads merely but in their hearts and for ever.

All over the world men speak of peace and long for it, but yet too often they don't really know what it is they seek. The world is full of every sort of division and fear; if only there were a way out! If only there were peace! But the peace of Christ lies beyond what the politicians can hope to achieve: it exists already and it cannot be destroyed. It exists because Christ exists: there is peace because Christ himself has achieved it, and our faith in him owes nothing to the changes and chances of the world. Eternal life is already begun for those who hear his word—and *keep* it.

Peace and Faith: conflict over, and the absolute assurance that man is made for more than a temporal hope which passes and is gone. And yet so much hatred and hostility remain: creed and class, colour and race—Is the peace of Christians more than a hope for the future, an ideal that may be fulfilled some day, somehow, but here below an ideal only? Our Lord supplies the answer, and especially during these days of his resurrected life when he is concerned to build up the faith of his apostles whom he is soon to leave. 'I have overcome the world', he says. He has known the furthest point of desolation and pain, of death itself: he was rejected, betrayed and abandoned even by his chosen ones. Yet it is precisely these sufferings of his that have been the instruments of the peace he brings. He shows his precious wounds, most glorious now as the pledge of his love, the sign for all who believe in him that peace means man's incorporation in Christ, sharing in his sufferings and death for love's sake and at last sharing in the glory of his resurrection too.

And faith is the condition of it all: the faith we ask for in the sacrament of baptism by which we are grafted into the Body of Christ, the faith which looks to everlasting life as its certain reward. 'Your joy no man takes from you', our Lord has said. That joy can never be taken away, for Christ our Lord has triumphed once and for all over sin and death: they no longer have dominion over man any more. The joy is serene and unshakable, for it is a joy within, rooted in Christ alone. You may have seen a whirlpool where all is tumult and confusion; as the waters

spin you think there could never be stillness here. And yet in the very centre of the whirlpool you may see a leaf or a stick suspended, absolutely motionless, completely still; surrounded by movement and noise, but wholly at peace. So it is for the member of Christ. He is in the world, he cannot escape from the noise and conflict so long as life lasts. And yet he can be at peace, he *is* at peace, if he remains constant in believing, if he sees his identification with Christ as meaning this—that the only thing that matters in the end is to preserve his faith and hope unshaken, for their source is Christ alone. He *is* our peace.

And so our Lord appears to his apostles—and to all who believe in him, and promises them peace. He must go away, soon they will be left alone, and yet never alone—for his work of reconciling man to his Father goes on: it is the work of the Church now, the Body of Christ that everywhere and always goes on making present the work of Christ. For the peace of Christ, which passes all human understanding, is not merely an individual hope: it is realized within the whole Body of Christ, he the Head and we the members, all one Body which exists to continue his healing, redeeming work. That is why our Faith must be so much more than a private possession, more than a personal joy. We must work for the peace of Christ as members of Christ, however separated by time and space, language of culture, class or origin. So today, when these words come to you from the heart of the English countryside and are scattered over the immense distances of air and ocean, you with us here in this priory church at Hawkesyard are joined by more than the physical fact of a sound that you hear. We are separated and yet we have a single hope. The circumstances of our lives may vary just as the lands we know vary, our problems may seem peculiarly those of the country in which we live. Yet beneath the differences there is a single need that each one of us recognizes—the need for peace of heart, a way out of the maze of our own conflicts and of the larger conflicts of the lands we know. The need is the same and in God's mercy that need is supplied for every one, too. For Christ our Lord came on earth to reconcile all mankind to his Father: the peace he brings is peace to all who believe in him. 'Learn of me', he asks, not only of Thomas, and the Apostles, but of all men everywhere. 'Be humble', he says. 'Recognize your need; see, and your heart will tell you that it is so—see that you can never find peace