

'For the Love of Christ'

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

*Like a shepherd he will tend his flock, and with his arm keep them together. –
Isaiah 40,11*

Collect:

God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of an eternal covenant, make us perfect in goodness so that we may do you will; and create in us what is pleasing to you; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

Psalm 23

1 The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in You alone,
and I will trust in You alone,
for Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.*

DESCANT

I will trust, I will trust in You.

I will trust, I will trust in You.

Endless mercy follows me,
goodness will lead me home.

2 He guides my ways in righteousness,
and He anoints my head with oil,
and my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

And I will trust . . .

3 And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
for You are with me, and Your rod and staff
are the comfort I need to know.

And I will trust . . .

Words adapted by Stuart Townend

Jn.21,15-19

Dear friends

This dialogue between Jesus and Simon Peter lets us in on the understanding of what the effect of the resurrection is. I hope very much that you are asking or wondering. It is one thing to know about the *fact* of the resurrection and another to know the *effect* of it. If you don't know or care about the effect of it, it will not be of much or indeed any use to you. A vaccine, for instance, can show this clearly: The fact that there is one is surely a good and hopeful thing and a necessary requirement. But there is also the matter of its effect and effectiveness. What is its effect? What is its use? Of this there needs to be understanding. So with the resurrection of Jesus. I hope therefore, to use another illustration, that we are like discerning shoppers who insist to consider the question of how effective a certain product is.

So let us look at this dialogue that Jesus had with Simon Peter on his third appearance to his disciples after his resurrection, bearing in mind that it is not about the fact of Jesus' resurrection so much as about the effect of it, its use.

In mind we must bear also that Simon Peter was the disciple who in the hour of Jesus' trial had denied three times that he belonged to Jesus or was even a friend of his. This explains why Jesus puts his question to Peter three times and not just once. Peter is enabled to say 'yes' for each time he had said 'no'. Remember also that Peter's denial and betrayal happened after he vowed never to do so, with the words: "*Even if all fall away, I will not.*" (Mk.14,29) This explains why Jesus asks: "*Do you love me more than these?*" Because having set himself above the others in his loyalty to Jesus, his fall was then the greater, and he felt in his conscience the debt of a greater love.

Now the effect of Jesus' resurrection is the mending/healing of this relationship, the same that Peter had abused and caused to break. And it was healed by the very one to whom he had been disloyal and whom he had disowned! Jesus might have been expected to take Peter aside and say something along the lines of: "You have betrayed me. How can there be trust between us again?" Instead he confirms Peter's love for him and entrusts him with his own mission: "*Feed my lambs.*" Something has changed, the healing that has taken place has put the relationship on a different footing. But that is the fruit of grace, of Jesus bearing the wrong that was done to him instead of visiting it on the wrongdoer, whom he so restores to a new relationship.

And it is this experience of grace, this costly love of Jesus which is willing to pay what the wrongdoer owes in order to win him back, which underlies Peter's love. It is also the only explanation for why Jesus who before his death and resurrection was very clear about Peter's inability to be loyal would

now be equally clear about Peter's ability to be entrusted with his mission!

But it is not enough to say that grace experienced "underlies" love, it actually produces it. You see, the thing about grace is that Peter is no longer what Peter once was (the difference being grace alone)! Here we are looking at the central issue regarding the effect of Jesus' resurrection! We can perhaps describe this effect on Peter in terms of an 'altered state'. Now when we speak of 'altered states' in people we think of something often drug-induced, delusional, a deviation from a 'right and healthy state', something if occupied permanently can render a person unfit in all sorts of ways. But in Peter's 'altered state', in deep and real contrast to all this, there is nothing delusional, nor is it limited to his mental faculties – *because it is grace-induced*. He is not rendered less fit but more so, if by 'fitness' we mean what feeds and nourishes life. The Peter who said he wouldn't betray Jesus was delusional, but not, as his subsequent life shows, the Peter who receives grace, is restored to fellowship with Jesus Christ and receives the command to love and to serve.

Grace changes him from a man who did what he did for the love of self to a man who does what he will do *for the love of Jesus*. He is the man to whom Jesus now says:

"The fellowship that you have with me and I have with you, even fellowship with God, stands in grace and includes all who belong to me, those already here and those still to come and all still to be called. As you love me, so you must love them. As I served you and restored you to fellowship with me and my Father, so you must go and serve those who belong to me. What I have done for you, that you must do for them. Remember how I said to you, "*Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me*" (Lk.10,16); and then again how I said, "*Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.*" (Jn.13,20) Feed my sheep, Peter. You are my voice and my sheep will hear because they know my voice and I will give them eternal life, will lead them to green pastures and make known to them what I have made known to you. You feed my sheep, you give them to eat!"

Peter would not undertake this out of a sense of not wanting to fail again (!), but out of a sense of wanting to obey Jesus arising from his love for him – from a heart won for Jesus through grace and thereby won for love. It is out of love for Jesus that comes the will and strength to love and serve, in the way it can only ever happen when it is in his name and for his sake.

Dear friends, the effect of the resurrection is relayed to us through what Peter and the other Apostles did in obedience to the charge they received from Jesus – "Feed my sheep". In the gospel we hear Jesus' own voice and by receiving it in faith we are restored to fellowship with God. Have we not received a message to be at an appointed place and time in order to receive the vaccine that has the power to save us from destruction by the virus? But God has appointed His Son Jesus Christ by cross and resurrection to be our salvation, the one and only "*name under heaven by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4,12): That in him we receive by faith the forgiveness of our sins – grace restoring us to fellowship with God. There is only one such spiritual vaccine – grace. It works 100% and has but one, albeit necessary, side-effect: love, it induces that 'altered state' whereby we move from love for self to love for Christ. When we receive it, our heart hears Jesus ask, "Do you love me?" and longs to say, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you" and will with the command receive the strength to forgive, to hope, to heal, to restore – to follow the risen Lord in his love for us.

AMEN

Lord of the cross of shame

1 Lord of the cross of shame,
set my cold heart aflame
with love for You, my Saviour and my Master;
who on that lonely day
bore all my sins away,
and saved me from the judgement and disaster.

2 Lord of the empty tomb,
born of a virgin's womb,
triumphant over death, its power defeated;
how gladly now I sing
Your praise, my risen King,
and worship You, in heaven's splendour seated.

3 Lord of my life today,
teach me to live and pray
as one who knows the joy of sins forgiven;
so may I ever be,
now and eternally,
one with my fellow-citizens in heaven.

Words by Michael Seward

Lord God, we thank you for making a way for us to dwell with you and know your love whereby you raise to life what is dead and open what is closed. Your way is grace through Christ, forgiveness of sins and life eternal. Save us, we pray, from any delusion to which we may still cling, that we can be in ourselves what we can only be in Christ by grace, so that we may not hinder your delight of seeing your children love and serve in the spirit of you Son, in whose name we give to you all praise and glory.

- time of prayer / intercession – [we pray for those who have become ill, are fighting illness or are recovering from it, for those who care for the needs of others; for those in positions of leadership and authority: that they may rule wisely and seek peace, that they may guard the values by which a society can flourish, that they may lead with courage and wisdom, for a turning to the light that is God's Word; for those who have lost loved ones, need comfort into their grieving and the loving presence of friends; we give thanks for all the help we have received and still experience, for grace and answered prayers; we pray for the despondent and the hopeless, for those who seek light, for the wisdom to comfort the suffering; we pray for our sister church in Northern India and for the body of Christ worldwide and here; we pray for God's blessing on the preaching and teaching of His word, for people to respond in repentance and faith, for freedom and liberty and courage to stand for what is good and true and honours His name;]

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who has shown us such love, and in his grace has given us such unfailing encouragement and so sure a hope, still encourage and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you. AMEN