

ARTICLE FOR COUNTRY GAZETTE

April 7, 2004

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Peace be with you! After Jesus was raised from death to new life, he appeared to the disciples with words of peace. Peace is what we all long for in our hearts, in our relationships, in our public life, in our world. But just saying the words doesn't make it happen... unless it is the voice of Jesus speaking them. Why did Jesus voice carry such weight? Because the peace Jesus spoke about was all encompassing. It included all of the above and more.

When Jesus spoke of peace it was first to assure us that we are not alone. Jesus loves us and is with us. We can't go anywhere he hasn't been first. He knows our pain and our joy and wants to be included in both. The Holy Spirit comforts and guides us, bring us into connection with other people for our good and theirs, to build each other up in love. God is with us, creating us new day by day. We are not alone.

The second thing about Jesus' peace promise is that it says we don't have to be afraid, no matter what life throws at us, no matter what struggle, disease, hardship. We don't have to be afraid because there is another dimension to life that is different. Things aren't what they seem, and if we keep believing and praying and working for good, we will learn to live into that dimension. Then even death won't defeat us. We can face life with courage. We can face violence and hatred without becoming violent or hateful ourselves.

The third promise is that Jesus' peace carries with it a calling, a task for each one of us to do. We are all invited on a mission from God. Jesus' own peace came from the calling he dedicated his life to as he stated at the beginning of his ministry. It was to speak good news to the poor, to bring release to captives, to help the blind to see, to free those who are burdened and battered, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, forgiveness and restoration.

The peace of Christ be with you! The peace that lifted Christ's weakness over Pilate's strength, suffering love over brute force, courage over fear, confidence over despair, life over death.