

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 1, 2016

[Acts 16:9-15, Psalm 67, Rev 21:10, 22-22:5, John 14:23-29](#)

“Peace”

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

The words of Jesus that we hear today are from the long section of John called the “Farewell Discourse” — Jesus’ words of instruction to his disciples at the Last Supper. He’s saying goodbye, with words he wants them to remember, words of comfort and guidance to those dear friends and companions and co-workers. This night is the last night of Jesus’ life on earth. Later that night he will be arrested; the next day, tried and convicted and crucified.

Judas has already left the table, going out into the night to summon the soldiers who will arrest Jesus. Simon Peter has promised fervently that he will never deny Jesus, who has answered by telling Peter that he will deny him that very night, three times.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” The disciples had fearful hearts that night, hearts filled with troubled questions.

The words we hear today are Jesus’ answer to one of those questions. Jesus had just told the disciples that soon the world would no longer see him, but that he would reveal himself to all who kept his commandments and loved him. So then one of them asks, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?”

Huh? It seems like this disciple didn’t quite get the message. Jesus has not said that he would reveal himself only to the disciples — but to all who loved him and kept his commandments.

When Jesus answers, he does what he did so often. He doesn’t answer the question that is asked out loud. Instead he answers the question in his disciples’ troubled hearts: “Lord, how will we manage without you? Why are you leaving us? Will you remember us?”

He reminds them to stay faithful to the love they have shared, to keep on living the way he has taught them. He promises that he will be found wherever love abides.

Our human love is never perfect love, but it is a reflection of God’s love, the love that changes us. God is already among us, at home with us, holding us with a love that enables us to love one another. So even in the middle of uncertainty or anxiety, fear or danger, we have the promise of that presence. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”

The peace of Christ is not the peace of the world, he says. “I do not give to you as the world gives.” So what kind of peace does the world offer?

Well, there are all those promises the world offers—that we'll be at peace if only we earn more money and have more in the bank;

or when we get a more secure job;

or get more recognition in our careers;

or when our children are finally “settled” (whatever that means — employed? Out of the house? Married?).

We'll be at peace once we finish high school, or college, or graduate school; when we get a job, or a different job, or when we can finally retire from a job that we got tired of a long time ago.

The world's peace is always somewhere out there ahead of us — something to reach for, something to hope for. Later. When you lose ten pounds, quit smoking, get sober, get married, get divorced, ...then you'll be at peace.

When this election is over. When hunger is banished and no child goes to sleep with the ache of an empty stomach. When war ends. When gunfire no longer shatters the peace of our cities.

In the meantime, there's peace through stress-management. Just about every month this is a featured subject in the newsletter I get from the Board of Pensions, the Lutheran organization that provides pastors' health insurance through congregations. The advice is always the same, and it's good advice about eating well, leading a balanced life, cultivating friendships, taking time to relax, laugh, and get exercise. Sounds simple, but it must not be working all that well, since the same advice is reprinted every month, and still Lutheran clergy have higher rates of obesity and high blood pressure and heart disease than the average American—and twice the rate of clinical depression.

But maybe we're just not paying enough for our peace, and if so there's help...everywhere you look, the world offers you a chance to buy it, with spas on every corner, yoga, luxury vacations, meditation, massage, ginseng, green tea, hibiscus, and more!

And then there is the lethal undertow of stress in the lives of people who live on the edge; the children of several generations of poverty; the people who deal daily with the pressure of racism and the threat of violence; children who don't feel safe in school; people who have lost their jobs and now are worrying they will lose their homes and their security in retirement and their children's future. Where is the world's peace for these troubled hearts?

We long for peace in our families, peace in our neighborhoods, peace in our city, peace in our world. But our hearts are troubled; we live with war after war and the threat of violence closer to home. The peace of the world is the unstable peace of peace maintained

through force — armies massed against armies; weapons stockpiled, police keeping the peace with guns, backed by the threat of prison. Well, in a violent world sometimes we need any kind of peace we can get; but this is the peace the world gives, not the peace of Christ.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.” The peace Jesus gives does not depend on what we do. It is gift, freely given. Peace, without conditions; peace, not enforced by threats or violence but secured by love. Peace that flows from the river of the water of life.

The peace of Christ doesn't depend on everything going well. It's the peace of the God who slept in the boat as the storm raged around him. The peace we ourselves may feel, strangely, in times when our hearts are most troubled and when we are very afraid. When whatever we cling to for security has been lost; when those most dear to us have been taken away from us; when our dreams are shattered and our hope fails. At such times we come face to face with the limits of our own resources, the fragility of our own lives. At such times, as our defenses and our delusions are stripped away, we let go; we fall into God's arms, and are held in God's peace.

Whether we are aware of it or not, that peace moves through our lives, the Holy Spirit stirring in us to ease our troubled hearts, to calm our fears. The spirit of peace, when we can let go of anxious comparisons and celebrate someone else's success;

the spirit of peace, when we are finally able to accept what cannot be changed;

the spirit of peace, when we can love others as they are, and not as we want them to be;

the spirit of peace, when we can see ourselves as God sees us—God's own beloved sons and daughters.

That Spirit is at work in worship too, moving through us to refresh us and make us new. “My peace I give you,” Jesus' gift breathed through the Spirit, as we hear again that we are forgiven and free; as we share God's peace to prepare for communion, our smiles and handshakes a sign of our longing for reconciliation. So come to the table, and take what you are — the body of Christ, broken and blessed. Be filled with God's own life, and go in peace.

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