

## Jesus' Peace

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year C: Easter 6: John 14:23-29

<sup>23</sup>Jesus answered [Judas (not Iscariot),] "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. <sup>24</sup>Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

<sup>25</sup>"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup>But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup>And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe."

*In a week full of racial injustice and war, how can we have the true peace that God offers? We discover God's peace is vastly different than the world's peace. We receive God's peace as gift.*

God's grace and peace....yes, grace and peace, be with us all. Amen.

This next weekend, I'm going to take my second weekend of the year off. Per our Letter of Call with King of Glory, Pr Deb and myself each get four weekends off in one calendar year. I'm looking forward to several days of being away from the office and meetings. The place I'm going is for me, a place of refreshment and peace. A momentary respite from my daily calling as your pastor. Thank you for that gift.

Peace I leave you, my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. We often hear those words at a funeral or graveside service. This week, as I studied this text, each and every verse could be a whole sermon series. St. John packs his theology tight. But I felt moved to come back to these verses about peace, given where we are in the world at this moment in time.

Last Saturday, a man in a Buffalo, New York grocery store killed ten people, wounding three more. Last Sunday, a man in a California Presbyterian church killed one man and wounded five others. Last week, the remaining Ukrainian soldiers left the Azovstal steel plant but were taken into Russian custody.

As the Black community struggles to come to grips with an act of violence from a man who ascribes to people of white skin color being better than others, their community aches for peace.

As a church community struggles with an act of violence because of racial tensions, they too are longing for peace.

What does peace even mean for the citizens of Ukraine who have fled homes and whose land is being obliterated from bombs? We might not dare to assume.

Perhaps the most common definition we have for 'peace', is the absence of conflict. The arguing stops, the house is peaceful at least for now. The police take the suspect into custody and the neighborhood relaxes back into peace and quiet.

Yet in the text, this is the night before Jesus' betrayal. He is headed to His arrest, trial and death. There is plenty of conflict ahead. How on earth does He experience, and then share peace?

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."

Offering a sign of peace was typical when taking leave of friends in Jesus' day. Yet Jesus offers more than a good-bye. He gives a gift to the disciples. Not only absence of conflict but wholeness we experience only in God.

We notice the disciples don't struggle to obtain Jesus' peace, they don't seek it out or pursue it. They only receive it as gift from God. "My peace I give to you."

So often we mistakenly believe we are in control of our lives. We make decisions, we move in ways that create a particular environment or outcome. We accomplish this, that and then even more!

It is only in surrendering and receiving, that we experience this peace that Jesus has on the night before His betrayal. For it is in surrendering our control, our limitations, our aspirations and even our successes, that we experience a very different kind of life God has for us. A life of peace.

Jesus knew that He couldn't avoid the cross. He was getting ready to surrender to the pain that was coming. No matter what decisions He made, nothing would change the outcomes of the next several days. Yet, He, Jesus, could experience God's peace as a gift and share it with the disciples.

The clue comes in Jesus' next statement. "My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives."

Just how does the world give? We regularly receive messages, we have to earn it. (Whatever that 'it' is.) We alone can protect it. We have to look out for number one. The world says, 'There is not enough to go around, and we have to compete for the resources there are. There are some people who are better than others, and you better find yourself at the top.'

These fear-based messages encourage individuality and competition. They make us think we are in control and that vulnerability is bad. Community therefore is not beneficial, nor is looking out for anyone else but ourselves. Who can we trust? There is no peace, for we must do it all.

Jesus' whole life was lived in contrast to these messages. Indeed, He gave to people very differently. He invited people into community by feeding them and healing them. He saw people at the edges of life and motivated others to not only see them but embrace them and love them. Jesus gently reminded those at the top that the 'top' is only a construct, but real power comes from being last and most of all, living God's commands.

How dissimilar are those two approaches. We all ache for peace. We crave it and seek it out. When we think we have the peace the world offers, it lets us down as a superficial counterfeit alternative.

I do not give to you as the world gives.

Indeed, Jesus does not. The fact that He can share peace within hours of His death reveals a depth that we often aspire to. But it is in letting go of the conflict, letting go of the pain, letting go of answers that are illusive now...it is there we receive God's gift of peace.

This letting go doesn't allow us to drop responsibility...yet rather, we surrender to God our need to control every detail and outcome. Our limitations become God's work of art as we place our lives, our fears, our families, into God's amazing grace and mercy. Therein lies our ability to have peace in the midst of conflict.

Horatio Spafford was a successful attorney having survived the Chicago fire of 1871 but it left him broke. He also lost his young son. Thinking his family needed a vacation, he sent his wife and four daughters on a ship ahead to England while he

stayed behind to finish some work. Unfortunately, there was a tragedy which claimed the lives of his four daughters. His wife sent a telegram and said, "Saved alone."

Horatio penned the words to a well-known hymn, "It is Well With my Soul." This is the kind of peace God can give in the midst of incredible loss and suffering.

To close, we're going to take a few moments of quiet prayer. I invite us to close our eyes and do a bit of visual prayer.

Whatever conflict is coming up for you or the pain of our community or world, hold it in front of you.

Allow God to see it exactly as you see it. Describe it in detail if you wish.

Then willingly reach out and allow Jesus to gently take it from you. Surrender it to God's wisdom, the wisdom you don't have to solve it.

Now breathe in God's peace, that all will be well. In God's time, in God's plan, all will be well. Breathe.

The peace of Christ - that only He can give - be with us all. Amen.