

EASTER 6 C SERMON for May 22, 2022 Grace Lutheran Church
TEXT: John 14: 23-29 (Jesus leaving, urges peace) by Rev. Jim Hill
TITLE: “Lasting Peace from God”

The peace of the Lord be with you always. *Response: And also with you.*

That’s our common greeting of peace in every Sunday service. But it’s also uncommon, because “the peace of the Lord” is no ordinary peace. It’s the special gift of peace from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus. In the Gospel text for today, we read that Jesus said: “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.”

Whatever we fear, disturbs our peace. Whatever we feel guilty about, disturbs our peace. Whatever it is in the future that we are worried about, disturbs our peace. There’s always something that disturbs our peace, because we don’t have complete faith in God; we don’t have total trust in God’s love for us.

In our text, we hear Jesus talking to his disciples about leaving them. “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’” Then Jesus said, “I am going to the Father”.

Jesus was telling his friends: “Trust me. My leaving you is going to be a good thing. Trust that I love you even though I must leave you. I don’t want you to be devastated by my death. I want you to trust that I love you, and that God loves you. So we should trust that God loves us so much that He will make everything (She will make everything) work out for the best in the end.” St. Paul says those exact words in Romans 8:28.

Jesus didn’t tell them anything specific about his coming crucifixion and resurrection. They wouldn’t have been able to understand it, let alone believe it. And they were devastated when Jesus was arrested and crucified, despite of his assurance of peace, despite his assurance that his peace would be with them and remain with them.

When someone abandons you, whether it’s by dying, or just going away, it’s discombobulating, to say the least. It disturbs our peace very much! Thus Jesus repeatedly reassured his friends: “My peace I leave with you, not as the world gives, but as God gives.”

A little later Jesus said that they would be scattered like sheep without a shepherd, but (he said) I will be with you. How? He gave them his Holy Spirit on Pentecost. In our text, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit “the Advocate”. They’d be protected by a “good lawyer”, a counsellor and advisor, even if they were throw in jail (and many of them were).

A bit later, in chapter 16 (*John 16:32*) we hear Jesus saying: “I have said this to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will face persecution, but take courage: I have conquered the world!” And subsequently, after Jesus’ death and resurrection, Jesus greeted them on at least 3 different occasions with the words: “Peace be with you.” “Peace be with you.” “Peace be with you.”

In our daily lives, Jesus gives us the peace that we want and the peace that we need: peace of mind and heart; calmness among the noise and confusion of our world; serenity in the midst of our anxieties.

There are, of course, physical and mental exercises we can do to help ourselves feel more at peace, at least temporarily. For me, being out on the water or out in the woods helps me feel relaxed and serene.

Some people are helped by yoga or breathing exercises or various kinds of meditation. The best meditation, of course, is prayer, which “availeth much”, as James put it in his New Testament letter. In the King James Version: “the prayer of a righteous person availeth much.”

Also, there is the peace that comes from the satisfaction a job well done, or the accomplishment of something worthwhile. There’s a peace that comes from an appreciation of God’s gifts. The more I pray, “Thank You for this, O God,” or “thank you for that”, the more at peace I feel. And at the end of the day, if I fall into a deep sleep, that too is a wonderful kind of peace.

So, many of us can say “Yes, I have found some peace of mind.” But it’s always a matter of degree, because we are not perfect, as Jesus was. We are always “in process”, working at achieving greater peace: peace in our family, peace in the world, peace with our environment, and peace of mind and spirit.

I’m sure you’ve heard of Bertrand Russell, the world-renowned scientist, mathematician and philosopher, and one of the greatest peacemakers of the 20th century. He won a Nobel Prize for literature, and he often travelled the world working for peace, particularly among nations with nuclear weapons capability. In the two years before he died in 1970 at the age of 97, Russell wrote his

autobiography, and he included in that book a touching love poem addressed to his fourth wife, Edith Finch:

“Through the long years I sought peace,
 I found ecstasy, I found anguish, I found madness, I found loneliness,
 I found the solitary pain that gnaws the heart,
 But peace I did not find.
 Now, old & near my end, I have known you,
 And, knowing you, I have found both ecstasy & peace,
 I know rest,
 After so many lonely years.
 I know what life & love may be.
 Now, if I sleep, I shall sleep fulfilled.”

(from *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*)

Bertrand Russell finally found peace. It came from finally finding love.

He could have found it earlier, had he come to know God's love. But he was a staunch atheist, and that's where much of his fame came from (at least in my circles at college). I remember he wrote a notorious book called, “Why I Am Not a Christian”. For some reason, it's no longer on my bookshelf – but I'm thinking that it's a book worth reading and discussing among us in a group study.

Anyway, I mention him here because he found peace only because he was finally deeply loved.

And so do we. That's how children experience peace, and teens find peace, and adults find peace. But the deepest peace of all comes from knowing we are loved by God, who invented love and is the source of all love. As God gives us love, we have love to share with our family and friends and ever wider circles of community. It's like a pebble tossed into a pond, making ripples outward. In 1st John 4:19 John says: “We love, because God first loved us.” That sums it up perfectly.

You were very blessed if your parents' love was strong, and if that love arose from their appreciation of God's love for them, especially the love God showed in becoming incarnate as Jesus and gave his life in demonstrating the depth of his Father's love.

But whether God's love comes through our parents or anyone else, the source is always God. God's love gives us a sense of inner peace and security and love of self, which is our springboard to loving others, whether those others are good or bad, saints or sinners.

A few moments ago I mentioned some things that disturb our peace. But the thing that disturbs our peace the most is sin. That's an old word, and not used very much these days. Sins that disturb our peace are the wrongs done to us and wrongs we've done to others. Whether it's the sin of hurting people or the sin of hurting our beautiful natural environment. Whether it's the sin committed in our conflicts with our family or our friends, or in the many conflict between nations.

It's always sins that disturbs our peace the most: sins like greed or hubris (arrogance); sins like misdirected anger or envy or jealousy or hate, or what might be the most common sin of our time: demanding "my way or the highway".

Prayer helps us move away from these sins and shortcomings, because prayer is an act of acceptance of our dependence on God and God's love. As I've gotten older, I've come to end my prayers with: "Nevertheless, Lord, Thy will be done." This helps my peace of mind because it's a prayer of trust in God's love, that God's will is love, and that God has complete power to make things work out for my good in the end.

So prayer helps to give us peace. Prayers of thanksgiving especially help me relax and focus on how blessed I am. Focusing on the positive is a relief, because I too often get bogged down in the "negative", obsessed with what's wrong, even the smallest things. Besides prayers of thanksgiving, prayers for forgiveness also help to ease the mind and calm the spirit.

Finally, there is peace in knowing that, someday in the future, God will make everything better – the whole universe will be transformed! That's the message of John of Patmos in today's reading from the book of Revelation. God will make a "New Jerusalem" – literally, a new "city of peace" which is what the word Jerusalem means. We probably won't live to see it; but we will die to see it. For God's people, death will be the doorway into unimaginable dimensions of existence. We will be totally bathed in light and love. And we will rest in peace.

The peace of the Lord be with you always. *Response: And also with you.*
Amen.