

Promise of Peace

By: Tom Schoenherr

May 1, 2016. Guest pastor Tom Schoenherr preaches on Jesus' words from John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." Where does peace come from? Sometimes we find peace, but it doesn't last. Sometimes it seems that our prayers are not heard, that Jesus has left the room, and we're on our own. Or is it that we don't really believe promises that may be difficult to receive?

*** Transcript ***

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

If we think about this passage from the gospel, John 14 that we just heard, I think we could think of Jesus as being very sad at this point. He may be welling up with tears, choking back emotion, because he's preparing the disciples for his crucifixion, for his resurrection, for his return to the Father. And in chapter 12 and 13, we also see this word "troubled" being used in relation to Jesus. Jesus is troubled. And that word can be translated as "disturbed." We're stirred up. We're unsettled. Jesus is with the disciples. He's brought them to the Upper Room, where he has consecrated the Lord's Supper and the bread and wine, his own body and blood, for the forgiveness and life of his people. He has washed their feet and shown them how they are to live and love and care for others in the world. He gives them a new commandment, that "you love one another as I have loved you." So Jesus has done all of this, gives them the promise that he is not going to leave them orphaned, he gives them the Holy Spirit, he gives them peace, and then he comes to these words: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

How does the world give peace? Sometimes peace comes, but it seems as though it's not necessarily lasting. Since 3,600 BC, in the past over 5,600 years in recorded history, there have only been 286 years of peace. In all of that time there have been over 8,000 treaties that have been signed. So we can use all kinds of force, all kinds of power in order to guarantee peace, but it does not last. I know that in many times, I am troubled and anxious. And you may be too. I get troubled and stirred up and disturbed, because of the continued violence that goes on against women, that gun violence, all kinds of violence against people in our society that continues. I get stirred up and troubled and anxious about presidential politics in this primary season. I get stirred up and anxious about the ways in which our society continues to be separated and divided racially and spiritually and economically. And then I hear Jesus say, "Don't let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." And I say sure Jesus, easy for you to say. Because lots of us have also lost loved ones whom we miss dearly. Some of us have illnesses that seem to come at no matter what age and leave us struggling, questioning. And I also find, and maybe you do too, that sometimes our prayers just seem as though they are going out into the air, and God isn't listening. And doesn't seem to be responding. And it seems as though Jesus has left the room, left the house. And we are on our own.

But left to ourselves, as we said earlier, we don't have any lasting peace. Left to ourselves we cry out into the emptiness, and there is only the sound of silence. And no peace. Why is it that we — who are God's people, to whom Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit and giving peace — are people who are very anxious and troubled? Is it because we have too high of expectations of the world and of Jesus? Is it because we feel so passed by by this rapidly changing world? Is it because maybe we really don't believe Jesus' promise?

Let's go back to those words again. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." That peace is not something that comes from the world or inside of us. It comes from outside of us. It comes from Christ, who also then lives in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. That Spirit is given to us from Christ, in order that we might have peace. And Jesus continues to draw us to the table, and welcomes us to that table, where we are strengthened for the work that we do in peacemaking in the world. He draws us to the table again this morning, and he gives us his own body and blood. He forgives our sin, renews our lives, empowers us with his spirit, and sends us out that we might be those people of peace and hope in a broken world.

If we think that we're going to see the end of conflicts, the end of war in our lifetime, we may be very disappointed. But what Jesus is giving us is deeper than that. What Jesus is giving us is a sense of well-being, a sense of calm in the midst of the storm. Then, in light of all of the anxiety, all of the trouble, all of the pain, all of the struggle that's going on in our world, we can still be at peace. And sometimes that's difficult to receive, and maybe we're left with those words that I used before. Sure Jesus, easy for you to say. But always, Jesus is inviting us into that peace, to receive that well-being, to receive that confidence in the word that he gives us, in the promise that he continues to put into our hearts and minds. You might think of a time when you were able to be a sharer of that peace with another person. Or when you were able to receive that peace from someone else — not maybe in those words, but just because that person was a person of peace in your life, and shared that presence with you. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives give I unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

Now we are sent out into this world as people who receive that gift of peace in order to speak to a troubled, anxious people — wondering about the world, wondering about a vision, wondering about the future, troubled in many ways. But we have a better story, a hope that is within us, a promise of peace that does not end, a promise of peace that is for the whole world.

In Jesus' name, amen.

*** Keywords ***

2016, Christ Lutheran Church, Webster Groves, sermon, podcast, transcript, Tom Schoenherr, John 14:23-29