

SERMON  
6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
May 9, 2010

Acts 16:9-15

Psalm 67

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

John 14:23-29

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ. Amen.

“How many roads must a man walk down, before you can call him a man? How many seas must a white dove sail, before she sleeps in the sand? Yes an’ how many times must those cannonballs fly, before they’re forever banned? The answer my friend, is blowin’ in the wind, the answer is blowin’ in the wind.”

In the turbulent 1960’s people would hang out in coffee bars singing the folksongs of Bob Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel, Joan Baez, and Peter, Paul and Mary. These songs cried out for peace in troubled times. Most of the songs pointed out the lack of peace, but offered few answers.

It was during the days of Woodstock, Viet Nam, Watergate, and the first man on the moon. It was the days of hip huggers and bell bottoms, long hair (for both women and men), sexual freedom, rampant drug use, the Beatles, ecology, and Volkswagen bugs. It’s interesting to see how certain things cycle back after 30 or 40 years.

Yes, “Peace” was the buzz word of the day. It signified the absence of violence or aggression. There were those who protested the Viet Nam War for the sake of peace. There were those who held non-violent “peace marches” for the sake of racial equality. Ecologists spoke out against the violence that was being done against nature.

Peace often seems to be the most sought for, and, at the same time, the most elusive treasure. For history seems to mock our feeble attempts at peace.

Over the last 3500 years of recorded history, the world has only been at peace a total of 286 years. That means that the world has seen 13 years of war for every 1 year of peace. Even today there are not only ongoing wars, but also rumors of war.

Approximately 30 years ago a married couple became very concerned about the threat of war in their home country. So they decided to carefully research the safest place on earth to which they could retire. They studied and studied, and they traveled all over the world. Finally they found THE PLACE.

And on Christmas of 1981 they sent their pastor a card from their new home – in the Falkland Islands – just a few months before the war between Argentina and England ravaged the small island paradise.

But even if all of the wars in the world would suddenly cease, there still would not be peace. For there are other things that take away our peace – things that still trouble our hearts. Every day, we hear what is happening in our world.

I saw a cartoon recently that shows a man lying on the couch of a psychiatrist. When the psychiatrist asked the patient what his problem was, he confided that he had all kinds of fears about the future.

“Doctor,” he began, “I’m worried about the energy crisis, unemployment, violence in our cities, climate change, the situation in the Middle East, political and social upheaval in Africa, killer flu viruses, our fragile economy, pollution, terrorism here in the United States, Iran becoming a nuclear power, immigrants flooding across our borders illegally, volcanoes, earthquakes, and hurricanes.”

In the final frame of the cartoon, the psychiatrist responded, “Be quiet and move over,” after which he proceeded to get on the couch with the patient.

A cartoon such as this would be much more amusing if it did not contain so much truth. Let's face it; living in our world today can sometimes lead us to despair. We never seem to know what horrible thing will happen next.

In our Gospel story this morning, life was about to radically change again for the disciples of Jesus. They were men who apparently had been very successful in their lives. Some had been fishermen, who had been called to drop their nets of their trade to follow Jesus. And another, had been called from his tax table to start a whole new life.

When they started to follow Jesus, they found their world radically changed. For months they had sat at the feet of Jesus as he taught them about what the Kingdom of God was like. They had witnessed miracles that are still talked about 21 centuries later. Now, Jesus was preparing them for another change in their lives. He was telling them that soon, he would no longer be with them.

The other Gospels record Jesus taking the bread and the cup from the table to be his body and blood. John's Gospel adds the scene where he washes the feet of the disciples to demonstrate his love and care for each of them, and as an example, of how to share that love with others.

Now he begins to give his final instructions. The instructions he gave still speak to us when our dreams don't come true, when our lives are suddenly turned upside down. When doors are slammed in our face, or new doors opened.

These words of Jesus are meant to prepare not only the disciples, but those who would come to be his followers. They spoke to how they and we would live without the physical presence of Jesus. For Jesus knew that for the disciples, it would be a shattering experience, one that would shake the foundations of their lives.

C.S. Lewis described in his own life a very similar experience on the death of his mother as he wrote in his book, the *Joyful Christian*.

“With my mother’s death, all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable disappeared from my life. There was to be much fun, many pleasures with my life with Joy, but no more of the old security. It was sea and islands, the great continent had sunk like Atlantis.”

You see, for Lewis, the death of his mother meant that a major part of his world was gone.

Speaking of mothers, today, of course is Mother’s Day. Now I am sure that many of you when you woke up this morning forgot that it was Mother’s Day, and instead remarked to your family; “Do you know what day it is today? It is the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Lectionary Year C!”

Mother's Day is a time to celebrate the lives of mothers. Giving birth, giving life, nurturing families, sacrificing for the sake of their children – these are all things that we lift up this day when we remember the women who brought us into this world.

But it can also be painful for those whose mothers have passed away. I know for a fact that some of you here this morning have lost your mothers since the last Mother’s Day. I have conducted the funerals for some of them. Therefore this is both a joyous day and a hard day. It’s also a difficult day for those who had abusive mothers and for those who desperately wanted to be mothers, but could not.

So it is into these uncertainties of our lives that Jesus brings us the words; “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.”

What a timely message for today’s world. For peace is just what it feels like we’re missing right now. Peace, after all, would mean the end of all this conflict, the end of all this turmoil, the conclusion of all of our waiting and wanting and worrying. Right?

Well, perhaps. I guess that I have always thought of peace as the absence of something negative – the absence of war, or violence, or strife, or fear, or anger. And indeed, the first definition in the dictionary agrees with this; “peace: freedom from disturbance.” But it occurs to me on reading and re-reading the words of Jesus to the disciples that maybe I’ve gotten it wrong.

Maybe peace isn’t an absence of something, but instead is its own presence. Maybe peace IS something, all on its own. Maybe it creates something positive, makes something wonderful possible, not just prevents something negative. Maybe this is what Jesus means by saying, “My peace I give to you. I do not give it as the world gives.”

If that’s so, perhaps we can compare it to faith. Faith is a gift that God has given us. St Augustine said; “My heart is restless, O God, until it rests in thee.” I think that we can see faith as something that fills that hole in our hearts.

It does not necessarily take away all the difficult things in life. Rather, it makes them bearable. It keeps the evils of this world from dominating us, from defining who we are.

I think that is what Jesus is talking about when he gives us his peace. It will not eliminate challenges and sufferings in life, but this peace gives us the power to not be overcome by them.

You see, if understood this way, there is nothing about Jesus’ words that would suggest either that he’s promising us an end to problems or that he’s inviting us to ignore them. Rather, he promises peace – not merely the ending of disturbance, but instead a confident expectation and hope about the future no matter what it holds.

It has been said that Martin Luther was once asked what he would do if he thought the world would end tomorrow. Luther replied, “I would plant a tree today.” That’s not optimism, but hope; not simply a lack of fear, but courage; not only the absence of disturbance, but peace – Jesus’ peace, a peace the world cannot give.

The composer Phillip Bliss shared his experience of peace in a famous hymn. His wife and children were crossing the Atlantic by ship. When a raging storm came up, the ship capsized and all of the passengers perished.

In hearing the awful news – though crushed by grief – Bliss wrote; “When peace like a river attends all my way; when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, ‘It is well, it is well, with my soul’.”

In a few minutes we will share God’s peace with each other before we celebrate the Holy Communion. Many people get this confused with some sort of personal greeting. It is not a time to say; “Good morning” or “hello, how’s it going”.

It is not our peace that we are sharing. It is the peace of Christ. We say; “The peace of Christ be with you always.”

And with that promise of peace comes the words of assurance that have spoken to countless souls throughout the ages, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” Like the kiss of a mother’s lips on a child’s hurt, it may not solve all the problems, but it brings an assurance that all will be better. Amen.

May the peace that passes all understanding be with you now and for life everlasting. Amen.

How many of you have ever forgotten something?

Let's see; have you ever forgotten to bring something for school? Have you ever forgotten to brush your teeth before bed? Have you ever forgotten to pick up your clothes? Have you ever forgotten to wash your hands before you eat?

Do you know what? I forget things all of the time. As a matter of fact, I've got some bad news for you. Did you know that usually the older you get, the more forgetful you get?

Sometimes it's okay to forget things. Let's say that I forget to put ketchup on my French fries. That wouldn't be that big of deal, would it? But let's say I forget to come to church on Sunday morning. That would be a big deal since I am the Pastor.

So what is it that you do to help you remember the important things?

I write lots of notes. When I have to remember something I write it down on a piece of paper so I won't forget. But that doesn't always work because sometimes I forget where I put the notes.

In our Bible story today, Jesus talks about how he has taught us to love one another and to do good things that will make God happy. But Jesus knew that sometimes we might forget. So do you know what Jesus did?

He sent us someone to help us to remember. Who do you think that might be? *Holy Spirit*.

The Holy Spirit is Jesus living in our hearts so that we can always be reminded to not only love others and treat them nice, but also that we can be reminded that God loves us very very much. The Holy Spirit is that little voice inside of us that helps us to make the right decisions.

Let us pray... Dear Jesus, help us to hear your voice, and then help us to follow that voice.  
Amen.