

Gospel: John 14:23-29

As Jesus talks of returning to the Father, he promises to send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who will teach Jesus' followers and remind them of all that Jesus taught. Even more, those in whom God makes a home will experience a peace that overcomes fear.

²³Jesus 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. ²⁴Whoever 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.

²⁵"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But 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. ²⁷Peace 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. ²⁸You 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. ²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe."

So here we are on the last weekend of May 2019. Does this seem possible? Perhaps like me, you are wondering how we got here this fast. I told Karen that maybe I should start untangling my Christmas lights. As we know each year when we come to this Memorial Day weekend, it is also a time, particularly tomorrow, when we honor and remember those who died while serving the United States Armed Forces. For these individuals, we are indebted to their commitment and sacrifice. Many, if not all, of the privileges we experience today are a result of those who gave their lives for this freedom that we enjoy. I wonder, if we were somehow able to interview them, if we asked them why they did what they did, what they were fighting for, I have a hunch that one of several words that likely would come up time and time again would be the word “peace.” I’m guessing that many of them would say they fought for this country, and their own families, so that we could enjoy freedom and peace.

Peace is a huge word. It means a lot of things to a lot of people. Think for a minute of all the ways we use the word “peace”. Do we mean and define it simply as the absence of war? We often speak about peace on earth, especially at Christmas, or if you are giving an answer in a beauty pageant contest. We talk about peace of mind; we may wish each other peace as we sign off an email or a letter with those words; we make a peace sign with each other at certain moments. I can remember growing up in my church in Pennsylvania the pastor always ended each sermon with the phrase: “And now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus - Amen.” We share of the peace of Christ in church nearly every service that we have. We are familiar with the phrase and response of: “The peace of the Lord be with you – and also with you.” The word “peace” appears in other places in

our worship liturgy as well. I was tempted to count. We speak about peace among nations, our leaders often speak about peace. I often find myself uttering the word when I say: "I'll have another 'piece' of cake." OK maybe that last one doesn't quite fit, but we get the point.

However, we say and quote things like: Peace on earth – goodwill to all." We say: "Peace out". We may observe that a person may be at peace. We observe that a person has an "inner peace about them." Peace is used in a variety of ways with a variety of packages attached to it. So, what is it? What is peace? Do we only define it in terms that means the absence of something - like peace is the absence of war or peace of mind is the absence of torment and restlessness? Is peace just a pipe dream?? Has this world ever known peace? So, again, what is peace? How do you experience peace? How do we experience peace? How do you know when you have peace? What is it to have the peace of God? As you can tell there are a lot of questions today.

In our Gospel text from John on this Sixth Sunday of Easter, we have Jesus answering a follower named Judas, not to be confused with the one who betrayed him, who came with a question. The question, that for some reason is not in the appointed text, was: 'Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?' It is with this response that Jesus begins to talk about the practice of love once again, but also the Advocate, the gift of the Holy Spirit that will come, but then he adds this little nugget: "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." "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you..."

What does Jesus mean when he says he leaves peace with us? As we live out our lives, we find ourselves in a middle of journey. Everyone's

journey is unique and cannot be replicated by any other soul. Along our paths we are confronted with differing life situations of unequal gravity. Some have some very difficult walks in the valley, and sometimes it seems many others have a tremendous amount of mountain top experiences. Whether it is the families that raised us, the education and job opportunities we have been afforded, whether it is the color of our skin, our experiences in other places, or the country we were born in, all of these form a life of happenstance, predicaments, and possibilities where we have circumstances thrust upon us, or had choices to make, all around a direction in life. And for many of us that has meant being a part of a faith journey, and for many of us too, if not everyone one of us, it has also meant to pursue a certain type of peace in the living out of our days. So again, how many of us have experienced that peace and what does Jesus mean when he leaves peace with us?

I think a few things are relevant. First, Jesus says he does not give as the world gives. This mean that any peace that the world gives is frequently deceptive or at best fragile, and perhaps most often built on a completely different notion and foundation than the Gospel. The peace of Jesus is not that same as the world's peace. Jesus makes this quite clear.

Secondly, I think what Jesus says gives us at least a partial definition of that peace when he says: "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." I think I could go for that.

In this path that we travel in our life journey, even in our faith walks, there are many things that trouble our hearts and cause them to be afraid: illness, job security, vocational direction, grades at school, decisions to move, relationships with our significant other, with our spouses, with our parents, with our children, with our siblings and neighbors. We often are

troubled with our world, with our country, with our community. We often are afraid of failure, afraid of tomorrow, afraid for the future, afraid for our lives, afraid for whatever is being blasted at us on the news, and afraid of the unknown.

I would definitely go for that type of peace - a peace that lets not our hearts be troubled, a peace that says do not let them be afraid. However, many of us do not have many moments like that; so, does that mean we aren't trying hard enough, that we aren't believing hard enough, that we aren't praying hard enough?

I think this peace of Jesus in the end does give us at least one strong perspective – that of hope. The life and message of Jesus gives us a hope that the ways of this world are not the final ways. The life and message of Jesus gives us a hope that what we may experience today is not God's final word. The life and message of Jesus points us beyond the temporary and to the eternal. The life and message of Jesus accompanies us through the valley and shadow of death to bring us to the light of God's love. The life and message of Jesus reminds us that hope is real and God's presence is real, that God's preferred future is and will dawn upon us. The life and message of Jesus comforts us, challenges us, and encompasses us in ways we cannot always understand. This I believe is the peace that surpasses all understanding. This I believe is the result of the empty tomb. This I believe is the hope for the world. I think in reality we probably only get glimpses of that peace of Christ, but with that glimpse comes promise and hope. This doesn't always we mean we get to understand it all, for most of the time we probably do not, but does point beyond ourselves, beyond our predicaments, beyond our self-created messes, and points us

to a reality that began when the women discovered that the tomb of death was empty. Amen