

John 16:25-33

## **The Peace of Christ**

In pretty much every in-person service of worship at St. Andrew's there is a sharing of the sign of peace. The words said by the worship leader are "Peace be with you" and the response by the congregation is "and also with you." Why these words? Why this sign of peace?

The peace of Christ is significant in the words spoken by Jesus himself and by other New Testament writers. It is a what the people of God have also desired from ancient writers of scripture to now. Yet it seems so illusive. When we look around at the world we see nations at war, people at risk, power and politics wreaking havoc on the lives of those who have no power or influence. Refugees fleeing violence and famine. The world does not seem a very peaceful place.

Yet for us, here in this country, we live in a particular safety, we do not feel threatened, at least not as a country at war. We head into stores to hear carols over the sound systems that would make you think that Christmas is all about love, good will toward all and joy. You would never know that the Christ child was born in a time when life was difficult and precarious.

Still, the birth of Jesus was how divine love became something more than just words. Jesus' life was divine love in the flesh. And this is significant as it means that Jesus and through Jesus, God knows what it is like to live an earthly life. God is not some far off entity that cares little about you and me. God's love for humanity, for creation was and is so deep that he came in Jesus to show us the extent of God's love. Jesus' life was one of teaching and healing, it was to teach about grace and restore people to relationships of wholeness.

Let the disciples themselves be our case study. Those men that Jesus had gathered around him for three years of ministry were imperfect, slow to understand, thought they had things figured out and spoke like they would stand by Jesus no matter what, only to learn after the fact that they were weak, had not understood what Jesus was teaching them, and rather than having followed a victorious leader who would be king, instead watched as their leader was hung unceremoniously on a cross.

Jesus knew all of this about them even as he was with them. In the hours before this particular conversation that we read today, Jesus has been telling the disciples what to expect in the coming days. He is letting them know that he will die at the hands of those

who want an end to the charismatic leader's influence on the people, especially those who are oppressed. There is nothing worse for those in control, those in power, that want to keep power, than to have people who are oppressed being given hope for a better life. That makes people think that change is possible.

This was the time of the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome. Thing was, though this was a time of wealth and prosperity, the peace was enforced, when necessary, through the slaughter of those who might think and choose to challenge those in power.

The reading for today comes from the hours before Jesus will be betrayed and arrested and Jesus is trying to prepare those closest to him for what will happen. He says to them, "I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father. <sup>26</sup>On that day you will ask in my name. I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; <sup>27</sup>for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. <sup>28</sup>I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father.' <sup>29</sup> His disciples said, 'Yes, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure of speech! <sup>30</sup>Now we know that you know all things, and do not need to have anyone question you; by this we believe that you came from God.'"

And Jesus responds, "<sup>32</sup>The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me."

Jesus is giving them final instructions, knowing that they really don't get it but in time all of it will make sense. As they experience the fear and uncertainty, the threats and the powerful, they we draw on all that he has taught them, they will remember, and in that remembering they will find their way. Jesus tells them that God loves them and their relationship with God is as close as the words they speak, the thoughts they think, and the hope they need. Just as Jesus is not alone, even though all scatter because God is with him, we are not alone because God is with us.

And then he says another thing that is easy to gloss over if you are not paying attention, "<sup>33</sup>I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!"

I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace.

What kind of peace can one have when everything around them is in turmoil? We look at the devastation in the Ukraine, the challenges and strife in Afghanistan, the hate crimes that instigate people to damage property and injure, even kill other human beings. We look at our own lives and think where can one find peace when they don't know how to pay the bills, their partner is abusive, addictions have ruined families and lives, grief and or illness has taken away joy?

And Jesus comes saying, “I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace.” Knowing all that the disciples would face, what you and I would face, Jesus offers peace. This is not peace that is outwardly enforced or even willed into being. The peace that we speak of when we light the Advent candle of peace is something quite different.

Carolyn Slaughter writes, “Peace is an inner harmony and sense of well-being based on our confident faith that God has accepted us, loves us and is in control of our lives, no matter how turbulent our external situation might be. Peace results from knowing we are forgiven and accepted by God. Peace does not require the absence of conflict or distress; it is a sense of tranquility and order regardless of what is happening around us because no matter our circumstance, God has everything in place and is in control. Peace is the internal assurance that no matter how the waves of life rock our boat, Jesus is in the boat with us.”<sup>1</sup>

This does not take away our freedom as human beings to make decisions or have to live with the consequences of decisions that we or others make. God does not want puppets. Yet God lovingly stays with us, will be with us through all that we go through.

In John 14:25-27 Jesus is recorded as saying, “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 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. 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.”

The peace of Christ is a gift. It comes to us through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, the love of God and the Holy Spirit given to us and at work in us and the world. If peace seems illusive to you at this time, it may be helpful to spend time in quiet with Jesus, give him your cares and concerns, your distress, your grief. It will not change the external forces and circumstances that you face, but it will change you. You may even find new insights to help you change your circumstances and find ways through struggle.

The Apostle Paul began and ended many of his letters with something that spoke to the peace of Christ and so using his words from 1 Corinthians, and as you go from worship into another week, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Peace be with you.

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<sup>1</sup>Slaughter, Carolyn. Following Jesus; Steps to a Passionate Faith. Leader Guide. Abingdon Press. Nashville.2008.