

Year C Easter 6 John 14 23 to 29

The perfect love of God and the perfect peace of God are inextricably linked like two sides of the same coin. We are to love as God has loved us – Jesus told us last week that he set the example. And, wow, what an example we have to aim for...complete humility, serving others in love, welcoming everyone to God's table – even the ones we think don't belong there. We must always remember that when Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he washed all of them...Peter who would deny him, Judas who would betray him. Jesus washed their feet, setting the example for us. This is the love that comes of the peace of God – a peace that the world cannot bring.

The world's idea of peace today is actually still very much like the world's peace in Jesus' time. Peace, according to the world, is dependent on the four p's – political stability, social prestige, material possessions, and personal pleasure. There is a study by psychologists Tom Ludwig and David Myers looking at what motivates westerners in terms of life-style, daily decisions, economic values. What they found was that our feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are always relative to our prior experience. If our current achievements are below those of the past, we feel frustrated. If they're above, we feel satisfied. This is what we call the 'adaptation-level phenomenon.' The problem is, once the level of achievement has been lived for a while, we become used to it and it is expected rather than seen as a positive achievement. For this reason, increased material affluence or social prestige gives us only an initial surge of pleasure. Once we raise our level of possessions and material wealth, we feel good at first. But then it soon becomes neutral. In order to recapture the feeling of happiness and satisfaction, we have

to raise our level of possessions again. We are on the world's treadmill of peace, love, and happiness (Augsberg Sermons 3, p.124).

Many of us are learning to consciously be aware that the world's peace and God's peace are not the same. When Jesus first appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, they were huddled in fear in the upper room, afraid that their turn at torture was coming. Jesus' first words to them were, "Peace be with you." They rejoiced in his presence. He hadn't changed anything about their situation but they rejoiced in his presence. God's peace is the deep, abiding joy of Christ's presence and the sure and certain hope of resurrection in the perfection of God's kingdom. God's peace does not instantaneously fix all of the little things that go wrong each day nor does it immediately fix all of the big things that happen in this broken world – a car crash, a terminal illness, a house repossessed by the bank...

God's peace is the deep, abiding joy of God's presence with us in spite of the brokenness around us and in us. Jesus tells us, "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" (14:23). We will make our home with them. The word we hear translated as "home" is the exact same word that Jesus has used just moments earlier when he told his disciples that there are many mansions in his Father's house. Mansions...homes for us with God...and we do not need to wait until we die. Jesus tells us he has already made a home with us. In John's Gospel, "eternal life" begins in the here and now. We have the deep, abiding joy of God's presence with us.

And, even better, God's peace is leading us – is leading the whole world, as a matter of fact – toward the healing of all of the brokenness, to a time when there

won't be little things or big things left to be fixed because God's peace is a mobilizing peace. Jesus says to his frightened disciples, "Peace be with you." His next words are, "As my Father sent me, so now I send you."

God's peace is not a sit back and put your feet up type of peace. It is a turn the world upside-down like Jesus did kind of peace. The eternal life we have with the presence of God through the Holy Spirit gives us a deep, abiding peace that leads us into action. With the Holy Spirit, we are to continue the work that Jesus began...speaking out against inequality and injustice, fighting against the excesses of the powerful at the expense of the less privileged and at the expense of the environment, loving sinners and welcoming them to God's table along with us.

We struggle with these things though, don't we? We often feel helpless in the face of big corporation. We worry that we are losing the battle in the face of the overwhelming need in our communities. We can lose that sense of God's presence with us. We can forget the feeling of deep, abiding joy. We can feel oh so human when we look around at our church and realize that we, who are meant to be a sign, foretaste, and instrument of God's kingdom look and act, instead, very much like the broken world around us – the world who values property, pocketbook, prestige, and personal pleasure. Jesus said that we, his sheep, will hear his voice and follow him. How do we know when we are hearing Jesus' voice and not our own? The voice of the world is strong in us, competing to be heard. Far too many times, I have heard people connect their pocketbooks and personal pleasure with getting what they want in the church. "If you do 'blank' I will withdraw my financial support." "If you change 'blank' I will stop coming."

We often get things wrong but we do get things right, too. And this is our training ground, so to speak. The word that we hear translated as “church” in the New Testament is the Greek word “ecclesia” and it means gathering. Not the building in which we gather just the gathering. We are the church, the body of Christ, when we gather here with God, in God’s presence, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Together we experience being the perfection, in the perfection of God’s kingdom that we are being drawn towards. Our prayers that we say, the Word of God that we hear, our words to each other in the Peace, our sharing in the bread of God’s table...each time the church is the church in gathering, we are living, in this place and time, in the perfect kingdom of God.

God’s peace and God’s love are two sides of the same coin. The key to living in God’s peace and love, to hearing the shepherd’s voice over the world’s voice, begins here with us in doing what we do as the church. Love one another as I have loved you, Jesus says. When we bow towards the altar, we are acknowledging and reverencing the presence of God. Archbishop Desmond Tutu points out that, when we share the peace of Christ with one another, that is what we must do as well...the Christ in me sees the Christ in you...the Christ in me reverences the Christ in you.

Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer  
Thought it scarcely worth his while  
To waste much time on the old violin,  
But held it up with a smile.  
“What am I bidden, good folks,” he cried,  
“Who’ll start the bidding for me?”

“A dollar, a dollar,” then, two! Only two?  
“Two dollars, and who’ll make it three?  
“Three dollars, once; three dollars, twice;  
Going for three...” But no,  
From the room far back, a grey-haired man  
Came forward and picked up the bow;  
Then, wiping the dust from the old violin,  
And tightening the loose strings,  
He played a melody pure and sweet  
As a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,  
With a voice that was quiet and low,  
Said: “What am I bid for the old violin?”  
And he held it up with the bow.  
“A thousand dollars, and who’ll make it two?  
Two thousand! And who’ll make it three?  
Three thousand, once; three thousand, twice;  
And going and gone,” said he.  
The people cheered, but some of them cried,  
“We do not quite understand  
What changed its worth?” Swift came the reply:  
“The touch of a master’s hand.”

And many a man with life out of tune,

And battered and scarred with sin,  
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd,  
Much like the old violin.  
A “mess of potage,” a glass of wine;  
A game – and he travels on.  
He is “going” once, and “going” twice,  
He’s “going” and almost “gone.”  
But the Master comes and the foolish crowd  
Never can quite understand  
The worth of a soul and the change that’s wrought  
By the touch of the Master’s hand. (Myra B. Welch, p.293-4 of *Chicken Soup for the Soul: 101 Stories to Open the Heart and Rekindle the Spirit*)

Each one of you, with the presence of God through the Holy Spirit, is a priceless violin...poised for action – ready to share God’s love, ready to bring God’s peace to the world. Although we pluck the strings, let us let God choose the tune.