

Easter 6 C Sermon
John 14:23-29
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“Deep Peace”

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²³Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and God 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 One who sent me. ²⁵”I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom God 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.

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Have you ever known a compulsive worrier? My mom calls such people “Worrywarts.” In fact, my mom often used this moniker to describe me when I was a kid. If I’m honest, it was true, and might still be. I was a compulsive worrier and I worried about everything. One of the things I worried about most was the possibility of intruders getting into our house. It was a big old house and there were six exterior doors on the main floor alone, not to mention access via the cellar door and the second story balcony door and that meant lots of points of entry for a potential intruder.

I remember one evening when my folks went out for dinner with some friends and left us at home with a baby-sitter. My sister,

brother and I were in the living room with the baby-sitter watching TV when I heard a noise. I became utterly convinced that there was indeed an intruder in the house and I convinced my siblings and the baby-sitter of this as well. We ran upstairs, through the master bedroom, and into the bathroom, grabbing the phone on the way in and locking the door. The baby-sitter frantically called the restaurant and we waited, terrified, in the bathroom until Dad came home from the restaurant, with the fire chief, to save us from the intruder who was never actually there...

The imagination is a powerful thing and Jesus knew it. It was the eve of his execution and he must have sensed the agitation, apprehension, and anxiety his friends were feeling. In our text, he assured them that he would never leave them alone—in a big old house at night, or anywhere else. He promised that his spirit would be with them always, reminding them of his teaching. And then Jesus blessed his small troop of worrywarts with peace.

Peace could mean any number of things though and I wonder what it meant to Jesus? To the disciples? What does peace mean to you? What does it mean for us when we share greetings of peace before communion? What does it mean when a mother cries out, “I just want a little peace!”? What are we looking for peace from?

In his Nobel Prize-winning play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, about the 12th-century martyrdom of Thomas Becket, T. S. Eliot explores the notion of Jesus’ peace through a monologue delivered as a sermon by Becket, who sensed that he would soon be put to death. Preaching to his congregation for the last time, Becket says:

Reflect now, how Our Lord Himself spoke of Peace. He said to His disciples, ‘My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.’ Did he mean peace as we think of it: the kingdom of England at peace with its neighbors, the barons at peace with the King, the householder counting over his peaceful

gains, the swept hearth, his best wine for a friend at the table, his wife singing to the children? Those men His disciples knew no such things: they went forth to journey afar, to suffer by land and sea, to know torture, imprisonment, disappointment, to suffer death by martyrdom. What then did He mean? If you ask that, remember then that He said also, 'Not as the world gives, give I unto you.' So then, He gave to His disciples peace, but not peace as the world gives.¹

I think this distinction between the kind of peace Jesus gives and the peace that the world gives is an important one. Jesus was talking about neither the fragile peace that comes when one warring faction finally dominates another, nor the peace of a mortgage-free home and a belly full of food, nor the peace that comes from having a fire extinguisher in the kitchen or a really good life insurance policy!

Jesus was talking about something else—something much harder to put our finger on. And it wasn't the absence of conflict or strife, challenge or difficulty, disagreement or dissatisfaction. Jesus was talking about the kind of peace that renders hearts grounded despite the shaking world around us; the kind of peace that lets us sing "it is well with my soul," and mean it; the kind of peace that moves us ever-forward, undeterred by debris in the road; the kind of peace that is embodied in wholeness—in knowing who we are and what we are called to do, and then doing it regardless of the challenges we may face; the kind of peace that, even in the midst of the wild and raucous cacophony of voices in our world, picks out a single strain of sweet melody and joins its song.

That deep, grounding, sustaining, inner peace is the kind that Jesus displayed in his life, even when preparing to face his greatest challenge. It's what he intended for his disciples, and, if we're

¹ T. S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1963.

honest, it's the kind of peace that we seek today. So, how do we get it?

There's no simple formula for achieving Jesus' kind of inner peace, but the example of his life, his ministry, and his teaching shows us some important road signs that will guide us on our journey. Firstly, Jesus knew who he was—accepted who he was—and he accepted others, no matter what. Secondly, Jesus was primarily interested in people, not stuff. Thirdly, Jesus was outwardly focused on others and he embodied that outward focus in acts of service. Fourthly, Jesus prayed—he understood the human need for meditation, reorientation, solitude, and reflection. And finally, Jesus followed his passion, his calling; he went to the place where his own deep gladness and the world's deep hunger met.

Confirmands, as you take the next step in your spiritual journey today, I pray that you will remember these road signs for peace: accept yourself and others; stay focused on people, not stuff; serve others; take time for self-renewal and nurture your spirit; and finally, follow your passion—your calling. Find the place where your own deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

Jesus knew true inner peace and he longed to share that peace with others, because true inner peace never stops with the individual. In fact, the Dalai Lama once said that to achieve world peace, “an atmosphere of peace must first be created within ourselves, then gradually expanded to include our families, our communities, and ultimately the whole planet.” Inner peace spreads into outer peace and that spreads into world peace. And right now, God knows we need some peace in our world.

Today, may the peace of Jesus, the peace that neither the world gives nor takes away, true inner peace, deep peace, be with you and with our world. Amen.