


“Seeking Peace Where?”

Sunday, May 14th, 2017

5th Sunday of Easter

#1 in series of 2: *“Seeking Peace”*

 **John 14:1-14 (NRSV)**

Jesus the Way to the Father

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks, be to God.

[2ND Service: Affirmation of Faith]

[MESSAGE]

Peace...world peace, peace of mind, inner peace, peace and quiet, peace like a river...it seems that peace is something just about everyone longs for.

We seek peace in the midst of conflict; we negotiate and find compromise.

We seek peace when our spirits are troubled by sadness, worry, or fear.

We pray and ask God to bring peace to us and to the whole world.

Peace, it would appear, could be the solution to many of our problems.

As we read the stories of Jesus, we hear him offer us a peace that surpasses all understanding; he gives us his peace, leaves us peace, and sends us forth in peace.

Merriam Webster Dictionary talks about peace in

terms of: tranquility, quiet; freedom from civil disturbance; harmony in personal relations; and a state of security or order within a community provided for by law or custom.

Over the next two weeks, we will talk about our yearning for peace, where we are seeking peace, and with whom.

Let us pray...Merciful God, we long to be at peace, with ourselves, with you and with the world. Show us ways to find peace and to make peace. Help us to understand what Jesus tries to teach his disciples. We pray in His name. **Amen.**

It may not seem that the text this morning is about “*peace*”.

However, Jesus seems to be offering the disciples a message designed to calm them.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled,” he begins.

We need to remember when this conversation takes place.

John’s gospel places it in the Upper Room after the Last Supper.

Jesus has just washed the disciples' feet, served them a meal, and announced that one of them will betray him.

He has talked about his own death and Peter's denial of him.

It's been a very unsettling evening and it's going to get a lot worse.

No wonder the disciples are confused and a bit agitated; they need the peace that only Jesus can offer them.

Jesus talks about a **place** in this section, and how we might get to that place.

Unfortunately, his reassurance is difficult to comprehend.

Where can this house be that is big enough for everyone?

The KJV of the Bible uses the word "*mansions*"; the NRSV calls them "*dwelling places*."

The first thing we need to recognize is that this is a metaphor; Jesus doesn't mean actual buildings.

The words refer rather to the extent of the Father's house, in which there should be abiding places for all.

There would be no risk of over-crowding in that house, like those in which the Passover pilgrims found shelter at Jerusalem.

I take this to mean that “**heaven**”, *however and wherever it exists*, is as **limitless** as the universe God created.

Certainly, it must be a place of peace.

The issue comes when trying to make sense of how Jesus suggests we get there.

He has just told the disciples that he is going to die soon and be raised in three days.

He now tells them that he is going to prepare a place for them and that he will return to take them there.

Then he says that they know the way to get there. First of all, it sounds like we have to die to get there.

I think that's a fair assumption.

It's just a little frustrating to think about the great things Jesus promises, the peace that passes all understanding, is only available when we die.

What's worse, "***knowing the way***" means following Jesus...And that road is lined with suffering and pain.

Now, we get to the good news; *remember this is a metaphor and Jesus **always** has good news.*

When Thomas questions him, Jesus explains that ***He*** is the way; he's taking care of the suffering and pain part...*not to worry.*

We get to know God because we have gotten to know Jesus; the peace and love we seek is found in our relationship with Jesus.

*"From now on, you **do** know him and have seen him,"* Jesus says of God.

We don't have to wait until we die to hear:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled."

Philip still isn't quite sure he understands what Jesus is talking about; I'm not sure I blame him.

Jesus responds, “*If you have seen me, then you have seen the Father; I am in the Father and the Father is in me.*”

This is significant because they understand this in terms of the word “*abide*” ...Jesus is saying that he abides in God and God abides in him.

This is a particularly intimate relationship.

It implies unity of mind and purpose; Jesus later tells the disciples that if they abide in him, he will abide in them.

In a nutshell, abiding in Christ means allowing His Word to fill our minds, direct our wills, and transform our affections.

If we go back to the image of dwelling places at the beginning of this passage, we can also see the concept of ***abiding places*** as a way of viewing the place Christ prepares for each of us with the Father.

The place of eternal peace that Jesus describes is an intimate place where God’s Word fills our minds, directs our wills, and transforms our affections.

Last Wednesday night we had a pretty loud storm.

The thunder and lightning caused a lot of “unrest” for our dog Tilly.

She doesn’t like storms at all and her reactions tend to grow when the storm is really loud.

Obviously, she doesn’t understand what’s happening and she reacts out of her fear of the unknown.

Peaceful sleep eludes her until the storm passes.

Through all of this, I was lying in bed trying to sleep.

I started thinking about this sermon.

It occurred to me that I could settle into peace and relaxation because I understood that the storm was not really a threat.

I had no problem falling asleep because I knew everything would be okay.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

What strikes me about this conversation is the way in which Jesus forms his responses to the various questions his disciples ask.

They have every reason to be unsettled at this point in the evening; “*peace be with you*” hardly seems like an adequate response.

They raise legitimate questions to help clarify Jesus’ confusing words of comfort.

Jesus does not dismiss their questions or diminish their concern.

He relies on their own personal experiences over the past three years and asks them to **trust Him**.

- “Believe in God, believe also in me.”
- “If it were not so, would I have told you?”
- “You know the way...”
- “Have I been with you all this time and you still don’t know me?”

You see, if we are to find any peace at all, we must trust what Jesus says and go where Jesus leads.

That is why the question today is, “**Where are we seeking peace?**”

There are a lot of people looking for peace within themselves and in areas they believe they can control.

Psychology Today recently ran an article that suggests, *“Make peace with yourself and set yourself free from the past.”*

I read another story about a man who was very concerned about his newborn son because of some complications.

He prayed to God for strength and healing.

As time went on the child progressed normally and seemed to be healthy; there were no problems, but the man continued to worry.

It wasn't until he went to a palm reader who told him everything was going to be fine that the man found peace.

Really? He prayed and didn't find peace until he went to a palm reader?

Sounds like he was looking in the wrong place.

I've heard people talk about peace as being the absence of conflict.

To find this kind of peace, I think you'd have to get away from everyone and become a hermit.

I don't believe that is where Jesus calls us to go.

We must seek peace at those places where humanity's profound need intersects God's perfect love.

I think that is what Jesus is talking about when he ends this passage talking about "*works*."

"Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these; ...I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

As we go forth, following Jesus' example, we will find the peace we seek as we help others find their way to Jesus.

When we share what we have and what we know about God's love, we will find the peace that passes all understanding.

If your heart is troubled and you seek God's peace, where are you looking?

You will not find this peace in a self-help book, a bar, or on television.

It is not hanging out in places where everything is about you.

Seek peace where there are people who need to know God's love; share Jesus and you will find peace.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**