

## “NOT AS THE WORLD GIVES (PEACE)”

A Sermon for the Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 1, 2016

Text: John 14:23-29

*“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.”*

Visualize peace.

Hold for a few moments, in your mind, a picture of what comes to mind when you think of peace. What memory, what photo comes to mind as an illustration of peace?

The images I come up with may be something like yours. When I picture peace, the first sets of images have to do with nature. I picture quiet scenes, far from the madding crowd, a quiet lake, a smooth beach, an undisturbed forest, a blue sky with a few scudding clouds . . . My first images are landscapes, with no people in the picture at all except for the implied observer.

Another set of images then comes to mind, pictures of people getting along. People smiling, saying “How do you do?”, friends hugging, people at leisure activities (never people at work!!!!), individuals for whom things are going right. I had a hammock once. Me in a hammock with a good novel, sunny day, no mosquitoes, peace. If a string quartet could have been serenading me, it would have been perfect peace.

That’s how I picture peace. And there’s nothing wrong with that. Those are images of peace. The pictures that came to mind for you, I could probably identify with as well.

Peace has two parts as I see it. There is the peace in my circumstances, and there is peace in my heart. The way I ordinarily connect the two is this: When I

have peace in all my circumstances, I have peace in my heart and mind. When I do not have peace in my heart, I blame that on something outside of me. I say or do whatever it takes to make my circumstances give me peace.

That is how the world gets peace and gives peace. By producing conditions we like, so that we feel peaceful inside. By changing circumstances, remedying problems, resolving the difficulties which take away my peace. If anything bothers us, disturbs our mind, we take care of that in order to restore our peace of mind.

But Jesus works from the other direction. “I do not give to you as the world gives.” He gives us a peace inside which makes us strong so we can be peacemakers even though and especially when our circumstances are difficult or challenging. He gives us peace which empowers us to give others peace. He doesn’t just tell us to be the change we want to see in the world. He gives us the change we want to see in the world. Instead of putting our energies into creating the conditions which make us happy, we are free to throw ourselves into the love of others.

“My peace I give to you.”

Personally, I would rather not have “Jesus’ peace,” thank you very much. Jesus had a peculiar peace at all times. His peace enabled him to love even though things were never perfect for him. From the beginning of his ministry, he was hounded by authorities and righteous people everywhere he went. He wasn’t even left alone when he went to his hometown. And at first it was the people who liked him who were the problem. They surrounded him and badgered him with requests for help, so that (Mark 3:20) “they could not even eat.” “The Son of

Man has no place to lay his head.” And of course, you know how it all ended in Jerusalem. Not what you and I think of as peace, but Jesus went through all that with this peculiar peace he left behind for you and me as well. If we are going to claim the peace of Christ, we need to picture the peace he himself enjoyed.

If someone wants to give me peace, my preference would be to receive peace the way the world gives peace—by making everything around me be nice, so I have no worries. Then I will have peace. Whew. Of course, I will have to put up a fence so other people’s troubles don’t come annoying.

But that is not how Jesus gives peace. He gives it to us proleptically, which is to say he gives a peace to us which our circumstances do not warrant. He gives it to us in advance of the improvement of our circumstances. He embeds peace in the gifts of faith and hope and love, so that we can work as people who suffer in the midst of a suffering world, yet know peace already, before it has been fully delivered.

He turns it around.

Jesus turned things around when he said we should do to others as we would have them do to us, instead of doing to others as they have done unto us. In so doing, he made us ambassadors of his own grace to the world, since he loved us while we were yet sinners.

So, if Jesus gives us peace beyond what our circumstances warrant, how does he do that? How does he make it possible for Christians to rejoice in all things, to give thanks in all things, etc.? How does he go about making us weird? Can we understand the peace which passes understanding?

A phrase comes to mind which I emphasized in a sermon a few weeks ago. In John 13, it says that at the moment when Jesus stooped to wash the feet of his disciples, his mindset was like this:

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself . . .

Jesus knew three things, and if we all know those three things, we can be fully charged with the peace Jesus left with us so that we could be foot-washers ourselves.

The Duna people of Kopiago do not say “hello” when they see someone. They ask a question. One of three questions, actually, depending on circumstances. They may say “Where are you coming from?” or “Where are you going?” or “What have you come to do?”

Those are the three questions to which Jesus knew the answers, in this little story. Where are you coming from? God. Where are you going? God. What have you come to do? To wash the feet of others.

This is our mission as well. This is who we are. Through baptism into Jesus’ own identity with God, we confess that we are from God. Because Jesus has promised that we will always be with him, we confess that we are going to God. And because Jesus has given all things into our hands, as his Father gave all things into his hands, we know that we are in this world to wash the feet of others, to serve God’s children.

To know the answers to these three questions is to know God, to rest in God, and to be at peace in our hearts “though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.”

“*Go bana gada ho?*” We are from God, our source, the ground of all being, the alpha. “*Go bana ungibe?*” We are going towards God, the purpose of all being, the omega. “*Go agi wanda ho?*” To serve God-----in the peace of God, here and now. Amen.