

FIRST LESSON: Numbers 6: 22-26
SECOND LESSON: John 14:23-29
May 22, 2022

“Finding Peace”

Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

Pastors don't get many compliments, but I sincerely hope I don't ever get the one this minister did. After the service was over and the congregation was filing out of the church people just nodded to the minister not saying much, until one woman stopped. She turned and said, “Pastor, she said, “your sermon today reminded me of the peace and love of God.” He was thrilled and asked why. “Well,” she said, “it reminded me of the peace of God because it passed all understanding and the love of God because it endured forever.”

It is my sincere hope that you don't find the peace and love of God this way!

Our scripture today from John's gospel tells us that if we love Jesus, we will obey his teaching. If we don't love Jesus, we won't. This sounds pretty straightforward, logical even. But then we have to remember that there are some people who claim to love Jesus and then proceed to lie and con their way through life. According to them professing Jesus and living a life pleasing to Jesus can occur on separate planes of existence. But not according to Jesus. According to Jesus, it's all or nothing. He even warns us, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 7: 21-23)

The disciples were afraid. Jesus had begun to talk about suffering and death. This was not turning out the way they thought it would when they began following him. The heady days of miracles and large crowds were giving way to greater and greater conflicts with the authorities. And then Jesus said he was going away. He tried to tell them that he was sending them an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to be with them and guide them. But an invisible Spirit is not the same as a flesh and blood physically present human being. It feels a bit like being told, “Okay just walk on this tightrope on your own now, and imagine that I'm still holding your hand.” How can the Spirit be any more than a placebo? Who is this invisible advocate?

Jesus said, “the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” He then added, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do

not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

The Holy Spirit is given the name *parakletos*, a Greek word that has been translated as “comforter,” “advocate,” “counselor” and “helper.” A *parakletos* is literally someone who walks beside us. The promise is that God will guide us from the inside. But that is not easy. We can all think of people who claim that “God told” them to do something, that from our perspective does not appear to be very godlike at all. Historically people have justified the most egregious acts as God’s will. How can we distinguish the voice of the Spirit from our own inner “voices”? When we’re listening for the Spirit it’s not like standing in an empty amphitheater listening for one voice. It’s like standing in the middle of 100 hyperactive fourth graders on a field trip and straining to hear one voice. At least that’s what my head feels like some days!

There’s no short-cut here. We have to know our bible, and we have to know Jesus. The Holy Spirit will immediately bring to our mind scriptures that speak to situations, but the Spirit can’t do that if we don’t know the scripture in the first place.

I once heard a woman stand up in a prayer meeting and say, allegedly from the Holy Spirit, “the Lord is judging us,” apparently for not worshipping Mary enough. It was a Catholic prayer meeting. Directly the thought in my mind was Romans 8: 1, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” I didn’t have to hunt for it. I didn’t have to Google it or wonder whether or not this woman was wrong. God provided the answer by the Holy Spirit immediately.

There are those who claim that their questionable ethics do not matter. God will never call them to account. But Jeremiah 17: 9-10 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? ¶ the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.” While the Holy Spirit will still tell me in my gut that God pays attention and that what I do does matter, if I know Jeremiah 17, or any of the many other pertinent scriptures, it’s a lot clearer.

The Spirit doesn’t invent new stuff for us. The Spirit reminds us of what has already been said. Our minds are often full of messages, messages of condemnation, self-justification, anger, fear and ego. We can easily conflate what we want something to be, or what we expect something to be, with the voice of God. We rush ahead of ourselves convinced of our cause. We make plans and start actions that may not be what God has in mind at all. That still calm voice is there. But we have to become still and open our minds and hearts to hear it. Sometimes the issue is clear-cut and scripture provides the answer. But there are other times when we seek God’s guidance and it is not a moral issue at all, but rather a matter of making the best choice.

The Spirit will guide us in life through scripture, the wisdom of others, circumstances and when it gets right down to it, our gut. But in addition to all this, the Spirit also gives us a very precious gift. **The Spirit gives us peace.** And Jesus said something that I confess I had not thought of in historical

context before. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. **I do not give to you as the world gives.**”

How did the “world” provide peace in Jesus’ day? The Pax Romana, or Roman peace, was well known. Rome brought order. Rome brought uniformity of government throughout very divergent regions. It brought new roads, laws, bureaucracy, taxes and a civil service. And it brought imperial force. The Roman peace was an imposed peace. The military made it possible. A highly organized permanent standing army brought an end to local feuds and ruthlessly put down any rebellion. The peace Rome brought was an external peace.

External peace is not without merit. Rome was oppressive, but constant conflict can also be disastrous. Businesses and trade prospered under Roman governance. There was stability. But what we all tend to look for in life to bring us internal peace is external peace. It’s just easier that way. I don’t have to do anything. Someone else has to do something! I’m not responsible for my own peace, outside circumstances dictate that. If my job situation changes, then I will have peace. When my children get a bit older, then I’ll have peace. When my children move out, then I’ll have peace. If only my spouse did do or did not do something, I’d have peace. When my house is clean, I’ll feel better and have peace. If the neighbors weren’t so noisy, I would have peace. If I had more money, I would have peace. If my health were better, I would have peace. As soon as there is no pain, no suffering and no struggle in my life, then I will have peace!

It never comes, does it? When my inner peace depends upon things outside of me, I am a leaf blown in the wind. But Jesus gives us peace, a peace that is unlike the peace of the world. Jesus’ peace is a gift, not a wish. Jesus didn’t say, “I hope you find peace.” Jesus said, “My peace I give to you.” Biblical peace means completeness, wholeness and calm in the storm. It is shalom. We are not promised a life without hardship. We are promised the calm strength to make it through. We are promised that no matter what happens we will not be left alone. Jesus will be with us. The Holy Spirit will be with us. God’s peace is not passive. It is active, bringing healing with it. And because of Jesus, we need not fear. Jesus says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

How do I receive God’s peace? I’m just as bad as everyone else running around having a nervous breakdown over things I have no control over. But while peace comes from within, it doesn’t come from me. It’s is when I draw close to God that I enter God’s peace, and God’s Spirit dwells within me. I forget this. We all forget this. We anxiously search for answers. We berate ourselves for even worrying. But peace can only be found in the presence of God, and the presence of God is just a breath away. When we stop running and turn our hearts to God, there we will find peace, not as the world gives, but true, deep, inner peace. Amen.

Numbers 6: 22-26

22 The Lord said to Moses, **23** “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

24 ““The Lord bless you
and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.””

John 14:23-29

23 Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. **24** Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

25 “All this I have spoken while still with you. **26** But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. **27** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

28 “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. **29** I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.