

THE PEACE OF CHRIST
JOHN 14: 23-29; REVELATION 21:10, 22-22:5
SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
DR. JEANIE STANLEY
MAY 9, 2010

John 14: 23-29

23 Jesus answered him, "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. 24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. 25 "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 27 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. 28 You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. 29 And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

The congregations who may have first heard our scripture passages this morning faced difficult circumstances. Scholars believe that the Gospel of John may have been composed in the late first century when Christians were forced out of the synagogues. The early Christian leaders were beginning to die. Jesus had not returned as soon as they expected. What were they to do?

Our passage from Revelation may have been worship liturgy during the same time period. It was presented to a congregation persecuted by the Romans. The Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed. The Christian house churches were insignificant compared to the Greek and Roman temples. Christians were killed because of their faith. Additional persecution was likely.

Whereas the Gospel of John gave hope and direction for life in the world as it is, the Book of Revelation described eternal life with God and with the Lamb. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we have the vision and faith to live as God's people in this life and in the next. We find peace in Christ through the Holy Spirit, not from our current circumstances. Listen to God's Word from the Book of Revelation.

Revelation 21: 10, 22-22:5

10 And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

22 I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. 25 Its gates will never be shut by day--and there will be no night there. 26 People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. 22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and

the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; 4 they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Thanks be to God for this Holy Word. Let us pray. Lord God, our light and our salvation, we give you thanks for the peace of Christ. We give you thanks for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in this life, and we give you thanks for the vision the Spirit provides of the world to come. Lord, you know our fears. You know our hopes. We are tempted to accept the peace of this world, and you know it is not sufficient. Open our hearts and our minds to hear your Word and keep it. Make your home with us this day and every day. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

What a week! The oil spill continues. The volcano released more clouds of ash. There was a flash crash on Wall Street. In less than 6 minutes the market fell almost a thousand points and we still do not know why. The leader of Iran sounds as irrational as ever. He told a news reporter that Osama Bin Laden is living in Washington D.C. Some experts say Israel may have as many as 42 nuclear weapons. So much for arms control bringing peace.

The economic woes of Greece may spread beyond the PIGS (Portugal, Ireland/Italy, Greece, Spain) to all of Europe. A U.S. citizen planted a bomb in Times Square. It failed because of his bungling, not the strength of our security.

If we do not keep up with international or economic affairs, we may be concerned about the floods in Nashville or the dangers our children face. A 13 year old girl disappeared this week from an Austin middle school. A Virginia college student was killed by her boyfriend. Both were star athletes at a good school. She would have graduated in two weeks. Some Mother's Day.

Teenagers die each year during graduation celebrations. How can we keep our kids safe? Parents and grandparents worry about what they can control and what they cannot. We are not always sure how to best protect our loved ones or ourselves.

Anxiety is not unique to older adults. Students face term papers and exams. Young people worry about relationships and about how they look. Many are concerned about grades and wonder if they will be admitted to the college they want. Young people are rejected and betrayed. Drugs, alcohol and sexual activity are available to kids in elementary school. Huffing and cutting are options. The temptation to find peace by doing whatever it takes to feel good comes early in life. So do concerns and anxieties.

Some of us worry that we may lose our jobs. Others already have. Some of us face financial concerns and credit card debt, while others worry about their health or the health of people they love.

Some of us are concerned about relationships. Others grieve the loss of loved ones and friends. Pastors are warned that Mother's Day and Father's Day produce as much grief and angst as they do joy. Some of us grieve the loss of mothers or children this morning. Others grieve for relationships they never had.

Fear, anxiety and sadness are part of human experience, regardless the century in which we live. According to the understanding of the world, we can sufficiently address our fears and anxieties by our own efforts. If we work hard, make good grades, date someone cool, take the right medicine, save enough money, eat right, study hard – the list goes on and on. Just eat this apple, the serpent said.

According to our society's understanding, if we do this or we accomplish that, we will find peace – yet we do not. In fact, studies suggest that wealth and success by the world's standards do not create a lasting sense of peace and well-being.

So are you peaceful on this Mother's Day of 2010? *Peace I leave with you*, Jesus said. *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.*

Jesus said these words to the disciples as part of his farewell at the Last Supper. There is no Garden of Gethsemane interlude in the Gospel of John. Jesus speaks to the disciples immediately before his arrest. Jesus did not offer peace from trouble. Jesus offered peace in the *midst* of trouble (Homiletics May 9, 2010, p. 19-20). He still does. Jesus offers us peace today, right now.

The world suggests that peace is the absence of conflict. According to our society, the peace and the good life are just one product, one possession, one experience or one candidate away.

In contrast, Jesus offers a peace that withstands injustice, suffering and death. Jesus offers a peace that leads us to resurrection and new life. Jesus offers a peace that is like the vision described in our passage from Revelation. A river of life runs through it. God provides the light.

There is more to the Good News. Jesus did not leave us orphaned and alone. We have a divine helper to look out for us. Episcopal Priest Barbara Brown Taylor (Gospel Medicine, 79-83) said the farewell speech of Jesus sounds similar to speeches mothers often make when they leave young children with a babysitter or an older sibling. Mothers give all sorts of directions to the children and then assure them that the babysitter will care for them until she returns.

Many years ago, my sister asked me to take care of my niece and nephew in Boston. As the youngest sibling in my family and without a child of my own at the time, I had little experience with children. My sister left all sorts of directions. The clothes were laid out. The refrigerator was stocked.

I made several strategic errors right from the start. Both the kids wanted me to sleep with them – no problem. I'd sleep in the middle of a king size bed. I did not remember that little kids kick and sleep sideways.

At one point I was not sure my niece was telling me the truth, so I told her the story of Pinocchio – only to find her telling me something and then hurrying to the bathroom mirror to see if her nose was any longer.

One night when I heard sounds that made me think there were rats in the house, I did not tell the kids I was concerned. Only later did I learn that my nephew kept crabs as pets.

The clincher was that it snowed for the first time of the season – heavy snow. My sister had not planned for snow. After looking everywhere and keeping the car pool waiting, the kids proudly left for school in rain boots, gloves that didn't match and other clothes either too big or too small. We all survived, but it was good when my sister and brother-in-law returned home.

My friends, hear the Good News. Jesus did not leave us orphaned, nor did he leave an inept aunt as our babysitter. Jesus gave us a divine helper, a counselor and an amazing advocate in the Holy Spirit. Jesus said the Spirit would help us remember what he said. Jesus promised the Spirit would teach us everything we needed to know. The Spirit will guide us and stand up for us, no matter what we face in life and in death.

Not only do we have the Spirit as our guide, but Jesus promised that God the Father, Son and Spirit would make their home with us if we love God and keep the Word. We keep the Word in worship. We confess our sins, ask for God's forgiveness and turn once again toward our Lord and Savior. We are assured of God's pardon and grace, and we receive the peace of Christ. The peace of Christ be with you.