

Easter 6C
St. John 14:23-29
May 1, 2016
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

My Peace

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

Peace. Calm. The absence of fear. The absence of conflict. The presence of quiet.

What a blessing peace is. When peace washes over you, you find a deep rest, a place of rest and bliss. You are in harmony with your surroundings. You are in harmony with the universe. The peace of God yields such feelings. The peace of God stills my troubled soul and relieves my anxiety. No trouble will overtake me. I need not fear. Such is the Peace that Christ Promises. A Peace, not as the world gives, but a transcendent peace, a peace that does not end. It is a source of peace that we can tap into and find rest for our souls. And again, here, we find freedom from fear.

But our world is fraught with fear every which way we turn. It is a wonder that we are not basket cases from the anxiety which is always at arms length and instilled in us to drive away what semblance of peace we might have.

Many of us live by fear. We are afraid of our finances, that we will not have enough to sustain our lives or our futures. We are afraid about our health, that some malady will overtake us and perhaps shorten our lives or at the very least, hamper our ability

to enjoy the fruits of our labors. We fear failure in the workplace. We fear failure as parents. We fear failure in our relationships. We fear we have failed as children to our parents. We fear our cars will get into an accident. We fear we cannot afford our homes. We fear rejection by neighbors and by friends. We even fear the rejection by a spouse. We fear we will be the victims of crime. We would fear our own shadows, if we could. There is so much to fear. And we fear death. Our hearts are troubled.

We are taught to fear in our families. We learn to avoid certain behaviors or things that would be perilous for us. Our parents protect us from harm by instilling fear in us. For example, "fear the oncoming cars when you cross the street." "Don't touch a hot stove!" These fears protect us. However, as children we make mistakes. We sometimes do poorly in school. We learn success is good, and failure is bad. Learning to fear failure can be devastating, as it can doom us to a lifetime of striving for the elusive perfection in a life where we are not allowed to fail.

We are taught to fear in the media. Turn on the TV set or the Internet and each day you will learn several new things to be afraid of: whether they are wars, disease, oncoming catastrophic weather, or some heinous crime which we believe will come around to effect us or one of our loved ones. There is so much fear mongering on the news, that many duck and avoid listening to it altogether, as a steady diet can disturb your peace of mind. But is the ostrich with its head in the sand truly free of danger? Is such behavior fearless or foolhardy?

Sometimes fear is a good thing and we can use it to motivate us not only to be safe, but also to avoid calamity. Common sense dictates certain caution, without making us preoccupied with fear.

We are taught to fear about our employment. Recently, someone told me that while on the first five successive nights of their vacation, they had nightmares about being fired from their job for taking a break! Imagine the fear instilled by many an employer. Sadly, many find the workplace an area of their lives filled with anxiety instead of being filled with the satisfaction of following your passions.

Financial Fear: there is the fear that we will not have enough to sustain our lives. We spend much time with troubled minds and hearts worrying about how we will make ends meet or pay this bill or that. Yet such worry will not bring us any closer to peace in our minds about financial security. Perhaps there is no such thing. That leaves me to wonder where true security is to be found?

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed the common anxieties and fears of everyday life, which appear to be nothing new: [Matthew 6:25-34] *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed*

your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

The sound of moving water, whether in a stream or at the shoreline, is often a calming and peaceful experience. So we seek out quiet fishing spots by a country stream, or simply lie on a blanket on the grass by a river, where the sound soothes our anxious mind and we find some modicum of peace. At the shore, the rhythmic cadence of the waves on the sand of the beach also bring a peace to our souls, as we stroll along the edge of the water. Water is cleansing and purifying. Water sustains our lives, and life cannot exist without it. Not only is water a powerful symbol of life, it is also indicative of inner peace. It is the spirit of peace that we seek to impart to this young child this morning as she is Baptized.

In today's reading from the Book of Acts, the riverside is a place of peaceful prayer outside the city as Paul seeks converts amongst the women there. In the vision of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, a beautiful river flows through it with the trees of life growing on either side of the waters, whose leaves provide healing, not just for the individuals witnessing the river, but also for the nations of the earth. And finally in the Gospel passage, Jesus leaves us with His peace, not as the world gives, but a peace which frees us from fear and anxiety. It is not a peace which the world gives, but a spiritual peace which comes from God.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God... Peace is the

beginning of our concluding prayer of blessing. Peace is truly a blessing, and when we can find it, there we also discover rest and refreshment for our weary souls.

So this peace is left to us today: the peace of Christ which passes all understanding. We may find that peace here in Church, I hope. We may find it in a park or in a garden. We may find it by the side of a river or a stream, or at the seashore in a quiet place. As we go for a walk, we may encounter that peace in the cathedral of trees in the woods soaring above us. We need more peace in our lives. God has left us peace. We have only to seek it out with the help of the Holy Spirit. AMEN