

- ¹ May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us,
² that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.
³ Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.
⁴ Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth.
⁵ Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.
⁶ The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.
⁷ May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him.

John 14:23-29

This passage is part of Jesus' words of farewell to his disciples on the night before his death. The speech is punctuated by the anxious questions of his disciples about his impending departure. Jesus seeks to reassure them and direct them in the new way they will live in him, through the coming of his Spirit, which in the end will blossom in peace. This peace however will not be like the oppressive reign of 'Pax Romana' but rather the peace known through God's reign of true justice and love.

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.

Sermon

Peace Be With You

Peace be with you. ... And you are supposed to reply 'and also with you'. That phrase is as old as Israel, by the way; and it is one of my favorite 'churchy' greetings. And if you really think about it peace is something we all desperately need right now. It doesn't take much to know that peace is seriously absent from the world – Russian's invasion of Ukraine, mass shootings in NY and Cal, and police and black men (and so many others) are killed every day.

So today, when we hear Jesus' promise of 'peace I leave you, my peace I give to you' we may be left wondering, if not about its validity, then certainly about its intent. The reading today is a continuation of Jesus' final evening with his disciples. He has already told them 'I am going away, and where I am going you cannot come.' As you can imagine, hearing of Jesus' immanent death has confused and upset those closest to him. Imagine what that would be like. We have all encountered the death of a loved one; and it has left us all bereft on a personal level. But add to that feeling the lose of a beloved leader in a faith community and the effect is compounded.

Do you remember when Lloyd announced his retirement, his departure? I'm sure it was a very sad time for you all, a real loss; and you wanted to 'keep him' as a part of the church's life, but you couldn't. And then questions rose up about 'how will we do this without you?' 'Who will care for us?' "Who will lead us?" 'What will happen to us now?' Those are the very same questions rolling around in the disciple's heads, and more.

It is in this roiling distress and confusion that Jesus says to them twice, like bookends to the passage, 'do not let your hearts be troubled'. And he offers them comfort and hope and some very profound promises. Some of them are found in the verses before today's reading, promises like "I go to prepare a place for you." 'I will not leave you orphaned, I am coming to you.' We (the Father and Christ) will come to you and make our home with you." 'I will ask and the Father will give you another Companion (the Spirit) to be with you forever.'

Those are all gracious, profound promises – all centered on God's abiding presence with us. And Jesus sums it all up with this 'Peace I leave you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.' Perhaps we can begin to sense what this peace, Christ's gift of peace, actually is. It is not the absence of conflict, or an easy, breezy calm. It is, rather, a deep and complete sense of wholeness, (a fullness of life, an integrity in relationships and an uprightness of community), regardless of what is happening in the world around us. It is the Shalom, the peace of God, that runs throughout the Scripture "fear not for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my right hand of righteousness." (Isaiah 41:10)

That presence of God is the essence of peace. It is the presence, power and guidance of God that this church was founded on, way back when some folks committed themselves to following God as the Trinity, when DL Moody and the second great awakening shook up and shaped this community, when Lloyd arrived and when Lloyd left. And it is the presence, power, guidance and even grace, that is here now, and will be here as we are reshaped and redirected in ministry and mission for today and tomorrow. Even in the midst of these changing times, the challenges we are facing, the anxious sense of loss and distress, even the questions of 'what's next', we have the promise of Christ's peace and the vital presence of God's Spirit. We can acknowledge our struggles, (physical, emotional, and even spiritual), believe in the goodness and faithfulness of God, release our traditions and expectations, and move forward with confidence.

So then, 'let us go forth into the world in peace, being of good courage...' Amen.

***Hymn**

Peace I Leave With You

NCH 249

Joys and Concerns

Prayers of the People

God of love and peace, we thank you for your faithful presence and continuing care for us. We thank you for coming to us in Jesus Christ and abiding with us through your Spirit. With such living help, O God, we find the courage and strength to live as your people, and so we come now, asking for your wisdom and guidance as we seek to serve you in our world today.

We pray for you church and for this congregation. May this be a place where your truth is heard, your ways are sought and your purposes are fulfilled, so that your gift of peace becomes tangible here in our community and throughout the world.

We pray for our world and all its leaders. May they find encouragement, strength and hope to pursue your true ways of justice and lovingkindness among the nations, so that all peoples may know the fullness of your peace. We pray as well for all who need your loving care today. May the ill know your healing touch, the sorrowful your comforting presence and the needy your generous, helping hand. We especially live up... and we thank you for....

We praise you, Glorious God, for your abundant goodness to us through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Choral Response Remember Me

Offering

God has embraced us in Christ and calls us to follow his ways. God has also empowered us through his Spirit. We offer our gifts that God's presence may be revealed, his truth prevail, his peace flourish and his love abound. Let us give with joy.

Offertory Music "When Morning Gilds the Skies"
Laudes Domini. Arr. Weekley & Arganbright.

For your peace granted to us in Jesus Christ, we give thanks, O God. For your power the Holy Spirit brings, we rejoice. For your Word that challenges and guides, we are grateful. For your love that calls us into service, we pledge our resources and our lives. May they bring glory to your name. Amen.

Doxology (choose the one that is best for your faith)

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise him all creatures here below,
praise him above ye heavenly hosts, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise God all creatures here below
Praise God for all that Love has done; Creator, Christ and Spirit One. Amen

***Hymn** Go My Children NCH 82

***Common Commission**

Let us go forth into the world in peace, being of good courage, holding fast to that which is good, rendering to no one evil for evil, strengthening the faint-hearted, supporting the weak, helping the afflicted, honoring all persons, loving and serving the Lord, and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

*** Benediction**

Go now into the world

and may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7 adj

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Postlude

“Blessed Assurance”
Phoebe P. Knapp. Arr. Bryce Inman.