

Sermon Pentecost 2020

May 31, 2020

John 14:23-31

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

**Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.** What do you think when you hear those words? On the one hand, you hopefully are comforted by them. You know Jesus, and you know that when He says something like this, it means that He gives you reason to not be troubled, reason to not be afraid. As Psalm 46 says, **“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea.”** You know that Jesus is your refuge, your strength, your safe haven. And yet in a time like we’re in right now, you look around and you say, “What?! Let not my heart be troubled? Let it not be afraid? What about this pandemic? What about this disease? What about the possibility of economic collapse? What about the fact that I’ve been stuck at home for two months and it’s not necessarily going to change soon? There’s plenty of trouble for me. Or what about the way people are responding to this? I can see division and it keeps increasing.”

How can we not have troubled hearts? How can our hearts not be afraid? Peace. **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.”** The peace that Jesus gives. That’s how we are not troubled, not fearing. Of course, we have to ask that good Lutheran question when we hear something like that, don’t we? So, *was ist das?* What does this mean? What is peace?

Well as we look at peace as Jesus would speak of it, we see that this would be connected to the Hebrew phrase, “Shalom.” I’m guessing most of you have heard that phrase. It’s a greeting. It means peace. But as we say this, we have to understand what it means broadly. We so often think of peace strictly in terms of being the absence of war. Or we think of inner peace, that absence of anxiety. But this peace means more than that. It means peace within your whole being. It means the sort of peace where your body is blessed to function as it should, your well-being is blessed with all of your needs of body and soul. But even still, it’s more than that.

When I looked this word up in my fancy pastor dictionary, the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, it gave five definitions for peace as Jesus speaks of it. First, it said peace, in its widest sense is *“the normal state of things.”* I think by normal here, we should understand that as normative. We should understand that as things being in the state they’re supposed to be in. In other words, what I said before about shalom, that this is the well-being of body and soul. So that’s first.

Second is the *“eschatological salvation of the whole man.”* Again, we often exclude the body from this peace and think of the soul, even eternally, but this peace is both. It’s body and soul, it’s the final peace that we have when we die and *requiescat in pace*, rest in peace, and when our body is raised for the final eternal Sabbath with Christ. It’s that peace on the last day. That’s second.

Third is *“peace with God.”* In Romans, as I point out with some regularity, it speaks of us as enemies of God in our sin. And this explains why there is struggle in this world. If our sin and our rebellion against God actually results in judgment and being cast from His blessed presence, even if we don’t experience the fullness of the hell that should await us, we get a glimpse of that in the things I was talking about when I started. We get a glimpse of the warring that happens; a warring between the good and the fallenness of sin. In Christ, there is peace. **“If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”** In the forgiveness of sins, the Lord tells us that on His part He has made a cease-fire. There is peace. Peace with Him. Just like we don’t fully experience the hell of judgment we should have now, we don’t see the fullness of that peace yet either. But that’s what awaits us in faith in Christ. So that’s third, peace with God.

Next is *“peace of men with one another.”* I mentioned that dissension and division that we see in the midst of the coronavirus. I think this is a deepening division in our country, and it’s concerning. But in Christ we see that there is a unity. There’s a unity in the reality that we all stand condemned by the commands of God, by that Law of God. But there’s a unity that in Christ all of that sin has been paid for, it’s been atoned for, and in that there is peace. Now we won’t see the fulfillment of this either, until that last day. Until His return, we’ll still see divisions, we’ll still see tribalism and identity wars, despite the fact that none of this matters

in Him. And sadly, those who reject God won't get to enjoy that unity at all, but this is a promise in Christ. That's fourth: peace of men with one another.

Finally, there is the "peace of the soul." This is the manifestation of the well-being I spoke of before, but it is within us. This is that freedom from anxiety. This is that calm that comes to us, sometimes inexplicably. That's fifth.

Of course, as I say all that, what a wonderful hope all of this is. As Jesus speaks this peace to us, what a blessed hope to cling to. In fact, we even know that as His Word does exactly what it says, that this peace is promised to us. But how do we get it?

Well, you see, lest we forget that this week actually is the Feast of Pentecost, we know that this peace comes to us by the work of the Holy Spirit. It's no coincidence that just before Jesus said that He gives His peace to us, He also said, **"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."** You see, the Holy Spirit is the One who brings that peace to us. He reminds us that Jesus promises us this peace in His Word and gives that peace to us. Just as the Spirit descended upon the Church on that first Pentecost, so also He descends on the Church now and brings us peace.

It's a bit different but you can see a glimpse of it in that First Reading of Pentecost. Think about the Old Testament and what we had there with the Tower of Babel. In that, there's this judgment against sin where mankind is divided amongst the various nations and the multiplicity of languages originate. But what happens with the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? He comes down and gives to the Church the ability to speak the **"mighty works of God,"** in all the languages there. In other words, what we see is that these mighty works of God in Christ, in the death and the resurrection of Jesus, there is this reconciliation and there is this peace in the midst of division. The sin that divides has its end and is overcome on Easter. And there peace comes, peace being brought to the nations at Pentecost.

Christians, this is that peace that is ours. The sin that divides us from God. That sin that brings war against Him and against each other, that sin has been crucified and buried in the tomb of the One who knew no sin Himself. In His resurrection the peace of God has been declared to the world. But to you the Holy Spirit brings it individually. He brought that peace as He descended upon you in the personal Pentecost of your baptism. **"Repent and be baptized every one of you in**

**the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”** And that peace is spoken still in your ear by the promise of absolution, fed to you in His body and blood. Peace with God, that your trials are not because God is mad at you and your sin, for your sin is forgiven. It’s in that peace that you have life. It’s in that forgiveness that you know this peace is yours because it’s promised to you in your whole being, it’s promised eternally, it’s promised in the reconciliation it brings you with God and through that your neighbor, it’s promised to your soul.

One final thought to give clarity, though. This doesn’t mean there won’t still be trouble. I was reading what Luther said about this and he put it this way: *[God still] allows the affliction to remain and to oppress; yet he employs different tactics to bestow peace: he changes the heart, removing it from the affliction, not the affliction from the heart. This is the way it is done: When you are sunk in affliction he so turns your mind from it and gives you such consolation that you imagine you are dwelling in a garden of roses. Thus, in the midst of dying is life; in the midst of trouble, peace and joy. This is why it is, as St. Paul declares to the Philippians (4,7) a peace which passeth understanding.*

And that’s the comfort. There is trial but there is peace in the midst of it. I remember when everything was going on with my dad and my aunt in 2018-2019, I was surprised how much peace I had. That’s not to say there wasn’t sadness. It’s not to say there wasn’t grieving and sorrow. There was a great deal. It’s also not to say there was peace all the time. But to reference Luther one more time, he says it so well again: *“You are not to be discouraged though you still shudder at death [or you have fear, or grief or whatever it might be].. For the Holy Spirit’s office is not one that is finished, but is in process of fulfillment from day to day, and continues as long as we live, in such manner that sorrow is ever mingled with peace. Yes* Christians, there is peace in the promises of Jesus. There is peace brought to you by the work of the Holy Spirit. There is peace as the Spirit works even by that Word Jesus has spoken in today’s Gospel: **“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.”** Yes, let not your hearts be troubled. Jesus promises you His peace. Amen.