

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
 East Moline, Illinois
 Pastor Becky Sherwood
May 26, 2019, The 6th Sunday of Easter
 Psalm 67, John 14: 23-29
THE PEACE OF CHRIST BE WITH YOU

Children's Sermon: How old do you think you were when your parents started teaching you to say "please" when you wanted something, and "thank you" when you got something. When I was little and I'd forget to say please or thank you, I can remember my mom saying: "manners." Or she'd say: "In our family we say please and thank you?" Is there a way your parents remind you, when you forget? (what do we say?, what are you forgetting?) Their hope is that when you are older saying please and thank you will be a natural part of your life

There are also words we say in our church family: Amen at end of prayers. Hallelujah and Hosanna. Every week we also say: "The peace of Christ be with you, and also with you." We will talk about it in the sermon this morning. Jesus gave us peace, and we are sharing it with each other. It's a family reminder that we are supposed to give the peace of Christ to other people. Not just in worship but during the week. Just like moms and dads have us practice saying please and thank you, in worship we are practicing giving each other the peace of Christ every week. Then what do we sing? It reminds us that the peace of Jesus connects us: One in the Spirit.

(See: <https://www.reformedworship.org/article/march-2011/passing-peace>)

This week as I spent time with this morning's reading from John, I kept coming back to Jesus' words about peace: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." It got me thinking about us passing the Peace of Christ to each other Sunday after Sunday. It is a regular part of our Sunday routine.

As I told the children this morning, every Sunday when we pass the Peace of Christ to each other, we are saying some pretty amazing words to each other. After we pray our Prayer of Confession and are assured of Jesus's forgiveness in the Assurance of Pardon I say: "The peace of the Christ be with you," and you respond "and also with you." And then we pile into the center aisle of the sanctuary and we pass those words around, giving and receiving Peace.

It's a joyful time of grabbing as many hands as we can; a time when our children rush around at our feet reaching up for our hands. Sometimes it feels a bit like we are saying good morning to each other in Jesus' name.

But we are saying so much more.

When we pass the Peace of Christ, we are standing on holy ground offering each other the gift of life-giving peace.

When we Pass the Peace, we are following in a tradition that Jesus himself started when he rose from death and first appeared to the disciples. In the 20th chapter of John (vv. 19-23) we read that on the evening of that first Easter, Jesus entered the room where the disciples were staying together and the first thing he said to them was: "Peace be with you." Then he showed them his hands and his side, to prove to them that he had risen from death. Then he breathed on them and said "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Jesus began his ministry, after his resurrection, passing the peace of God to his disciples. We continue that same practice in his name every time we gather to worship.

That peace that Jesus gave to his first disciples is still, 2000 years later, being passed from disciple to disciple on Sunday mornings all over the world. We are offering each other holy words when we reach for hands across the aisle on Sunday morning.

We are blessing each other, blessing our children, blessing our teens, with the peace that Jesus has given to each of us.

What powerful words and actions we use each week!

We hold on to each other's hands and offer each other peace.

The apostle Paul began his letters to the early Christian churches with the words: "Grace to you and Peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." We stand in a long tradition of followers of Jesus giving away the peace that we've been given.

When you do something week after week it affects your life. Much like children learning to say please and thank you, we are learning over and over again in worship to give and receive the Peace of Christ. (See: <https://www.reformedworship.org/article/march-2011/passing-peace>)

We are practicing giving peace to friends and strangers and family.

In Matthew's gospel we hear Jesus' words: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:9)

Sunday by Sunday we are practicing being peacemakers who will reach out to anyone with the gift of peace.

We reach out to friends,

we reach out to family who drove us nuts in the car on the way to church,

we reach out to people we've never met,

we reach out to spouses and partners who we found a bit aggravating this week,

we reach out to people we don't agree with,

we reach out to people we love,

we reach out to people whose only touch this week will be our hand extending peace,

we reach out for the next hand we see,

because every single hand around us belongs to a child of God.

Now, there is an important reason we don't do this right at the beginning of worship. Passing the Peace is so much more than just saying good morning in Jesus' name to the person sitting beside you, or in the aisle behind you.

Instead we prepare in Silence first, preparing ourselves to give God our gift of worship.

Then we are called with music and words to worship our God who brought us together, and we respond with a Hymn of Praise.

Having been reminded of God's goodness, we realize our need for God's healing, so, week by week we are called to a time of confession.

We pray the Prayer of Confession together, we confess our sins privately in silence, and then we hear the promised Good News of our salvation in the Assurance of Pardon.

It is then, as God's forgiven children, blessed by the peace of Christ that we pass that peace that holds our lives together.

As loved and forgiven people of God we say to each other: "The Peace of Christ be with you," and we answer: "And also with you."

Then in a tradition that has been a part of this congregation for at least 30 years I believe, we join hands making sure everyone is connected and sing *"We are One in the Spirit."* I'd be interested to know after worship if any of you know when this congregation started singing *"We Are One in the Spirit,"* after the Passing of the Peace.

In the way we worship together we are practicing the amazing truths:
that we carry the peace of Christ in our lives,
we can give that peace away to each other,
and in Jesus name we are united together in God's love.

How does it affect you, that this is part of the rhythm of your week?

How has it stretched your heart to reach out in peace week after week?

What does it mean to you to sing the news that we are *"one in the Spirit,"*
each time you come into this sanctuary to worship God?

So, what is this peace that we are offering each other week after week?

In John's gospel Jesus says: "I give you peace, the kind of peace that only I can give. It isn't like the peace that this world can give. So, don't be worried or afraid." (Contemporary English Version)

In both the Old and New Testaments this kind of peace is found in the word Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace.

Shalom, or Jesus' peace, is so much more than just getting along, or being kind to each other, or the absence of war.

When we are offered shalom, Jesus' kind of peace, it is peace that has to do with wholeness and well-being. It means being safe in body, mind and spirit. This kind of peace means the healing of relationships between God and people, and between people with each other. Shalom brings a harmony that is only possible through God's love.

Jesus gift of peace to us is the gift of deep and healing love in God's name.

Shalom is healing and love in God's name for all people, for creation, for relationships,
for you and for me.

This kind of peace only comes from Jesus,

who lived and died and rose from death for you and for me and for the world.

This peace, this shalom, is what we pass to each other Sunday by Sunday.

What powerful words we are saying to each other as we grab the next hand and say "The peace of Christ by with you, and also with you."

What a privilege it is to get to share the peace of the risen Jesus with each other.

We are reminding each other of a most amazing gift every time we share those words together.

Jesus has blessed us with peace, with healing, loving shalom.

And now we are called to be givers of that peace not only in a small moment in worship, but in all that we do when we leave this place!

For the next weeks I'm going to invite us to share peace and shalom with each other twice in worship. Once during the passing of the peace, and then at the end of worship to remind us that we are being sent out as peacemakers.

I invite you to turn in your bulletins to page 6 for our new Benediction Response, *Farewell My Friends*. If you are a person that likes to read music as you learn a new song, you can find this on page 540 in your hymnals.

For some of you this may be a familiar song. But in case it isn't we are going to practice it now and then sing it at the end of worship.

Linda will play it all the way through once so you can hear it. Then we will sing it together twice, so it begins to feel familiar.

Just as we practice passing the peace of Christ to each other Sunday by Sunday, let us practice singing the passing of Shalom to each other now: Sing *Farewell My Friends*.

Our **Benediction** this morning comes from our Celtic mothers and fathers of faith:

Deep peace of the running wave to you.

Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.

Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the Prince of peace to you.