

My Peace I give to you

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give 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.” This was a hard promise for Jesus to make knowing full well the violence and losses that he and ultimately his friends would soon be facing. I find great comfort knowing that Jesus understands how we parents, grandparents, teachers, counselors, and concerned adults feel when we allow our children to grow inch by inch by letting them explore a world that is full of love, beauty, risk, and life-threatening danger.

I have not yet found a way to deliver Jesus’ reassurance of peace to our daughter Rachel who is student-teaching at an inner city elementary school in Spokane. Just the other day her school was locked down until an armed 13-year-old teen, who ventured onto their campus with a loaded gun was apprehended by the police. However, the real hero of the story was a school administrator who firmly but compassionately communicated with the teen so that the violence did not escalate into a tragedy.

Yes, we need peace. Jesus knew that when he walked and witnessed the many injustices that surrounded him. He lived in the time of Pax Romana or so-called Roman Peace. It was not at all what Jesus meant by peace. Cesar Augustus and the ruling class of Rome, regarded peace not as an absence of war and violence, but the rare situation that existed when all opponents had been beaten down and had lost the ability to resist.

We still need peace 2000 years later and Jesus’ promise of a different kind of peace couldn’t be more relevant. Amidst returning war veterans, domestic violence, contentious divorces, random shootings, bullying at schools and work places, and movies, sports, and video games that often glorify violence, we are tempted to dismiss Jesus’ promise of peace as being too idealistic and other-worldly to be of practical value.

And yet, in today’s gospel story you can see the full presence of God’s peace-keeping forces fully deployed through the Blessed Trinity in action: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit working together in harmony, and with perfect communication, to bring us peace. They are the original peacemakers and they want us to do the same by making their home with us.

God tells us that he desires to make his home within us and that is the surest way we can find the peace that surpasses all human understanding. Some of us may find that we first want to clean up our homes before we invite God in. But just know that really all God asks is that we open the door—he'll do the cleaning!

God's promise to dwell in the midst of his people has deep roots in the biblical story of our salvation. Before the Israelites had a temple in Jerusalem they first were a nomadic people who constructed the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was not a secret military weapon. It was a sacred chest built according to the exact specifications given to them by God. It included the Ten Commandments and a pledge by God that he would dwell among them and give them strength to be His faithful people forever. The tent that contained this Ark was known as the tabernacle.

This is a tradition that we continue as Christians. Near the sacristy door directly behind me is a wooden box attached to the wall which contains the reserved sacrament of bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Jesus. It is a reminder that God is always present in our community and that God desires to tabernacle within each and every human heart so that we might know peace. There are many ways we can allow God to create this tabernacle within us: opening our hearts through prayer, nourishing our souls with God's word, renouncing the temptation to do violence or harm to self or others. Allowing God to create this tabernacle within us is the first important step in becoming God's peacemaker.

The second step to becoming God's peacemaker after God dwells in you is to allow God to propel you into action. We are not here to build Pax Romana. We are here to build Pax Christo and the new Heaven and Earth that God has promised us. Jesus offers a different kind of peace than what the world knows. Jesus does not ask us to draw a line in the sand to divide us into opposing armies. Rather Jesus draws a circle in the sand to bring us together as one. The New Testament is clear on this point: Jesus "has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility that is between us" and that "There is neither Jew or Greek...slave nor free....male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

How is this to happen? Jesus and the Father have sent us the gift of the Holy Spirit known as the Advocate, the Comforter, the Counselor, and the Helper. We will celebrate this fully at Pentecost in just a couple of weeks. Have you noticed that no matter what the liturgical season happens to be that the Holy Spirit is active within our hearts counseling us, nagging us, guiding us, sometimes cajoling us to the right

thing, the holy thing, the non-violent thing, which will bring down all that divides and separates us and draw us into deeper communion with one another?

In today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles we learn how a once violent male, a Pharisee turned Christian apostle, by the name of Paul is guided by the Holy Spirit to cross over gender and ethnic lines to meet with Lydia, a gentile businesswoman, and likely widow. It could have been disastrous: A proud and successful man creating a competitive power struggle with a strong and independent woman to see who was the more dynamic missionary. But the Holy Spirit as the Holy Advocate protected them and provided them with all that they needed. The Spirit gave them a shared love language in Christ that not only opened the doors to Lydia's home but opened her heart so wide that she and her whole household were baptized.

Wouldn't you love to know what words opened those channels of love between this unlikely brother and sister in Christ? At St. Thomas we will be attempting to find an answer to this question. Believing good communication is the key to creating healthy, life-affirming relationships we will be offering a new series beginning this Wednesday night called, "Engaging the Languages of Love." There we will be unpacking the different ways that we can show and receive love so that our relationships with our partners, friends, children, co-workers, and loved ones can be a place where peace, love, and joy can dwell and flourish.

We will learn about how to find keys that will open each other's hearts no matter how locked up that may be and transcend the barriers that keep us from knowing God's peace and sharing the love of God more deeply. We all know that good communication precedes deep communion, and deep communion is the source of all lasting peace in our world. When we are communicating well with God, all is well.

"My peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not be let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid." Even after being victimized by violence and broken relationships, Jesus stayed with love and kept communicating in the language of love no matter what. Jesus had very few material things to leave behind in the end. Even his clothes would eventually become the property of the soldiers leading him to his Crucifixion. But there was one thing he could give us and did leave with us: a love which brings peace. Amen.