

**Homily, St. Andrew's
Easter 6C, May 1, 2016
John 14:23-29**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

“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.” Today Jesus promises us peace. What is this peace of which Jesus speaks? How is the peace of Christ different from the peace of the world? I’m going to ask you again in just a few minutes, so let it simmer in the back of your brain while we remind ourselves where we’re at in our liturgical year and in the Gospel of John. I’ve been away, as you well know, so a little re-orientation is in order, but it can’t hurt for all of us remember where we are in the bigger picture. Then we’ll talk together about peace: What is peace? What is the peace of Christ?

Our passage today comes from the middle of Jesus’ long farewell speech in the Gospel of John. Set in the context of the Last Supper and washing the disciples’ feet, the speech stretches from chapter 13 to 16 and ends with a lengthy final prayer in chapter 17. The speech contains Jesus’ final words of wisdom and comfort as he anticipates his departure from the world. In the context of the gospel story, Jesus is preparing his disciples for his crucifixion, but hearing it today, as we near the end of the Easter season, we read it in the context of preparation for Jesus’ Ascension just prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

On this sixth Sunday in Easter, the trauma of Jesus’ crucifixion and the shock of the empty tomb has past. The Risen Christ has appeared among us and we have struggled past our fear and doubt to believe that God has indeed worked a miracle of new life! A new community has begun to form around the sacred ritual of table fellowship and the disciples have begun to live again, to live anew, as they begin to work out what Jesus’ resurrection means in and for their community. And now the first breezes of another change have begun to gently blow... The day of Jesus’ Ascension approaches when Jesus, the Resurrected Jesus, will be going away... going to the Father. But Jesus will not leave us orphaned, or so he promised just a few verses ago. The farewell address circles around themes exemplified by action words like: coming and going, believe, know, see, remain, and love. Throughout, Jesus seeks to assure the disciples that even though things are about to change, they are going to be okay. They are not to worry or fear for the future. Jesus begins the speech with the assurance: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.” And 27 verses later, we hear it repeated: “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.”

This promise of peace comes directly on the heels of the promised coming of the Holy Spirit. The promise of a Helper, an Advocate, who will dwell within the community of faith is repeated from earlier in chapter 14, and the injunction against feeling troubled or afraid is familiar, but the promise of peace is new. This is the first time the word ‘peace’ appears in the Gospel of John. “Peace” is a standard greeting and leave-taking address in the Hebrew world - Shalom - but Jesus is not offering the world’s peace. What is this peace of which Jesus speaks?

What is the peace of Christ? If that's too hard to articulate... what is peace NOT?

[ask for responses... conversation...]

What peace is NOT...

Peace is NOT just being nice. (*Fierce Conversations*, p. xix, xx, xxi)

Peace is NOT (just) the absence of conflict.

If violence or oppression is required to maintain it, it is NOT peace!

Peace is NOT unanimity... being all the same

“Peace, with justice, through sacrificial love.” (Bp Jim Cruickshank) “There is no peace without justice.” “There is no justice without sacrificial love.” “Sacrificial love means taking other people’s interests seriously, when other people’s interests are not your interests.”

Jesus’ peace offers neither the false promise of security nor the end of conflict. Instead it is a peace that no longer fears suffering or death. It is peace that comes through self-giving: knowing oneself and being able to care about the interests of others. As one commentator describes, “... these are not sentimental imperatives, simply telling the disciples not to worry, but call the disciples to find strength to face the new circumstances in which Jesus’ departure places them.” (NIB, 751) In other words, Jesus says: things are about to change... I am going to the Father... and you will be okay. The musical leadership in our parish is going to change... We are going to talk together about whether or not we want to offer greater welcome and inclusion to GBLTQ people by asking permission to bless same-sex relationships. AND together in Christ, with the help, comfort and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we will be okay. It’s not magic, it’s trust. It’s not easy, it’s sure. It’s not security, it’s peace. All we have to do is claim the promise as we are taught by the Holy Spirit and remember all that Jesus said and did. “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.”