

Text: *John* 14:27-28 Peace I leave with you; 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.

## **DO NOT LET YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED**

If you look around you and peace is what you see, then you have not been paying attention. Whether it is in the international arena or closer to home, peace seems to be a most elusive commodity. And commodity it is – a product that is bought and sold in the marketplace. Jesus put it a bit differently when he said “my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.” The peace of Jesus is not part of a market economy. When the world gives peace, it expects reciprocity. A payment of some kind must be made in exchange for peace. Service and money at the least, unquestioning obedience at the most. The very foundations of the nation-state are dependent upon this bargain. Whether or not it is a Faustian bargain varies with the circumstances and our capacity to swallow hook, line and sinker the rationale of the day.

Jesus knew Rome as a great and oppressive, occupying power. While his teachings would have a

profound effect on governments of the future, he wanted his adherents to know that even as he left this world, he left them with a peace that healed their hearts and cast out the demon of fear. Let us spend a moment looking at the peace of Jesus.

**A gift:** First of all, his peace is a gift. We cannot buy and need not buy that gift. He bought it for us on the cross. Economists would tell us, oh, but there are opportunity costs. We must treat our fellow humans with love and avoid injuring them either directly through our actions or indirectly, through our positions on public issues. If we did not accept Jesus's peace, we would be able to rob, cheat and steal our way into an effective role in our economy. Most of us, as Christians, would say that we can be effective contributors to our economy without robbing, cheating or stealing. We would not value those opportunity costs. Peace is a gift freely given and freely received. It is, at least, a two-fold gift.

**Well-being:** Perhaps the less profound, but the more evident, part of the gift of peace is a real and tangible state of well-being. This is not necessarily related to the amount of wealth one has, but it is related to how one uses and sees that wealth. Whether rich or poor there are some people who use what wealth they

have to exercise their power over others. There are others who use position and/or wealth to psychologically dominate people, frequently even family members. These individuals do not know the kind of well-being that comes from the peace of Christ.

On the other hand, we all have known families that seemed to almost glow with a sense of worth and purpose even if their finances were in poor shape. They may not even be particularly religious, but they have the sense of well-being that comes from being enveloped in the peace of Jesus. They realize that over large portions of their lives they have little personal control, but that in many ways, both large and small, their free-will allows them to make decisions that enhance their personal well-being. I have known police officers who were able to deal with tragedy with both compassion and command presence. They were able to keep their sense of self in very difficult circumstances because they had a deep and abiding belief in the peace of Jesus.

**An inner rest of spirit:** The second part of the two-fold gift of peace from Jesus is what allows well-being to be tangible. It is an inner rest of spirit. It is entirely appropriate to question our religious beliefs. Doubting Thomas was never rejected by Jesus and continued to

play an important role as one of the first apostles. His faith became stronger as he questioned and resolved his doubts. However, there is much to be said for reaching a state of spiritual belief that allows us to give our spiritual wanderings a rest. This kind of Jesus peace means very different things to different people. That is a good reason to withhold judging others as they build their own journeys. Some of us, and I include myself in this number, are religious minimalists; we believe that there is an intelligent and creative presence that we call God. Everything else in religion flows from that bed-rock belief. Others believe that Christians must believe in the literalness of the Bible, in the tangible meaning of symbols and the infallibility of church leaders.

All of us tend to hold these anchor beliefs so firmly that we experience an inner rest of spirit, a ceasing of the questioning of what we personally have defined as our essentials of faith. When we have reached that state of belief, the peace of Jesus gives us such a profound rest that we have a great deal of energy left over to build and to elaborate on our tangible well-being.

On accepting Jesus' peace, we then can truly say that our hearts are not troubled. Peace and love reinforce and inform one another so that our well-being is never in

doubt. In a world in which fear is the basic currency of politics, the peace of Jesus places us beyond the reach of that demon and may even allow us to defeat fear with faith and love.

So, in church, when we exchange the peace, let us make sure that it is the peace of Jesus and not the peace of the world with which we greet one another. May the peace of Jesus be with us all. Amen.