

“His Peace He Gives to Us”

John 14:23-29

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In our society today, the idea of granting peace to someone as you depart is almost entirely lost and foreign. In the near east it is still practiced to this day, in words like “Shalom” in Hebrew, for example. In our text this morning, the Lord, Jesus, tells His disciples in v 27, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.” We have so many different definitions for peace on our society today, so it is not surprising that this text takes on different meanings for many people, inside and outside of the church. There are those who view peace as a simple feeling of calm and tranquility. There are those who view peace as no war or violence. And there are those who see it as just a general lack of conflict where everyone “just gets along.” No matter these definitions of peace, the Lord has a very distinct understanding in His mind when He says this to His friends, His brothers. And as those who are also His brothers and sisters by faith in Him, His peace He gives to us, as well.

These worldly understandings of peace are so convoluted by sin, they cannot possibly be associated with the peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Worldly peace can be a very good thing, however. As we walk in this world of sin, our “home away from home,” it is good and right to seek peace among our fellow residents and with our home itself. We should want to avoid conflict, instill calm and tranquil ideals, and avoid war and violence whenever possible. Yes, “can’t we all just get along” is not a bad mantra to carry around with you. But we cannot seek a perfect world where perfection cannot be reached.

The Lord certainly desires that we live a life of peace on this earth. Psalm 72:7 says, “In his days may the righteous flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more.” And again, in Isaiah 32:18, “My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.” Our worldly home is meant to be one of peace, but the context of these passages in which the Lord wishes this for us, or when we pray to Him for such peace, is surrounded with the reality of being righteous. And the truth is, we are not righteous in ourselves. As those who still bear the sinful flesh, our Old Adam makes peace in this life impossible. His goal is to create tribulation and turmoil for the people of God, and He is so very good at it.

The unbelieving world is completely engrossed and enamored with trying to create a peace that it cannot achieve, and the “church” is being sucked in by that endeavor. The

people of God, as they become enamored with worldly peace in places like Ukraine, Palestine, Israel, and even political peace in our own country, have lost the truth of our total depravity. We are sinful people, each and every one of us. We cannot escape that truth, no matter how much our sinful flesh wants us to deny it and believe we have the capability within ourselves to create peace in this life. We will constantly try, and we will constantly fail. Our Old Adam will dust himself off and keep egging us on, poking and prodding us toward a goal that is never reachable.

And that is why we must daily drown that sinful beast in the waters of our baptisms. We must beat back the thoughts of the evil one which plague us every day, and declare to him that “one little word that can fell him,” calling him the “liar” that he is. Peace on earth, in the worldly sense is a vain pursuit. It can never be achieved. It is one of the greatest carrot-on-a-stick approaches that Satan uses against us. Our sinful flesh will constantly case it, wanting to prove that we have the ability to do it ourselves, and the carrot will always remain out of reach. We will never reach the satisfaction of peace within our worldly home.

But within the context of this worldly home, the Lord has given us a place of peace where we can gather. Here in this place, amongst our dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we can find the peace which he has promised to leave us in our Gospel lesson. This is not a peace in the worldly sense, though. As we have seen all too well, this world will not let us have peace in that sense at every turn. They are constantly working the devil’s plan to upend the righteous people of God at every turn (joke’s on them). The peace we come here to find is not a lack of conflict with our neighbor, or a feeling of calm and tranquility. Those things do naturally flow from what we come here to receive, but they are not what drive us here.

We are driven to our peaceful church home, to receive the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, brought to us in His Holy Word by the Holy Spirit with whom He has blessed us. And to understand what that truly means to receive that peace, we must look to that Holy Word for our answers. Jesus tells His disciples in John 20:19, 21, and 26, “Peace be with you.” This peace which he brings to them is in the context of their unbelief when He appears to them on the night of His resurrection. They are huddled together, locked in a room, and their Lord and Savior appears before them and blesses them with the peace He promised to leave them in our Gospel lesson. The promises of the Lord have been fulfilled, and these men now understand it. His peace is His forgiveness. He has died and risen from the dead that these and all men would have His peace—His forgiveness.

He has forgiven them for their unbelief, for doubting His word that He would rise again from the grave after three days, and so He says to them, “Peace be with you.” It calls to remembrance the words of Jesus in John 14:1, as he finishes telling them of His coming death, “Let not your hearts be troubled.” Our sinful flesh will always try to sow doubt and discourse among God’s people, but we are called to be at peace, because by the blood of Jesus, we are forgiven. We have been redeemed, purchased by His suffering and death and won back from the clutches of the evil one. He can no longer hold us, because by the promise of the Gospel in the baptismal waters, we now belong to Christ having been baptized into His death and resurrection, as Paul teaches us in Romans 6.

That is the peace we find in this place. We gather around Word and Sacrament to receive the forgiveness of sins which God has promised to give freely according to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But this is not the place where peace will abound forever, either. Just like the worldly peace that people seek, one day our need for this peace will also pass away. But not because it is no longer given, but because it will no longer be needed. When the final trumpet sounds on the last day and we are either called home in our bodies or awakened from the grave to rise and live in the Holy City, as John says in our epistle lesson, we will no longer need to seek His peace. We will be abiding in His peace.

The peace which He promises to give us in the forgiveness of sins here in this life is a foretaste of the perfection and righteousness that awaits us in the heavenly dwelling of His Father. As John records in Revelation 21:4, our epistle lesson from last week, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” When we are robed in the righteousness of the Lamb as we ascend into glory with Him, we will know what it means to have His peace. We will finally have the full experience of the peace with God that He has promised us, a peace which we only know by faith in this life. Then, in the light of His glory, we will know it in its fullness. By His grace we will dwell with Him in peace, a peace which belongs to us as the adopted sons of God as we live with Him in our eternal inheritance.

The peace of our heavenly home is what Jesus’ peace is preparing us to have. Even that peace which He gives us now is not meant to last forever. It is meant to point us to the truth of His heavenly feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which will have no end. That is what awaits us. Our foretaste of that feast as we eat His body and drink His blood for the forgiveness of sins is a reminder that there is more to come. As we gather around this table, joining with all the saints who have gone before us as we eat of the life-giving Savior Himself, we await the moment when we will have that feast in its fullness, truly side by side with those who have attained the heavenly glory that awaits us as well.

The peace which our Lord and Savior promises to His disciples, and to all believers in all times and places, is not the peace of this world, or a call to create a peaceful utopia. It is the peace which surpasses all human understanding. It is peace with God, who in his righteous justice must punish sin and cannot tolerate the unrighteous. Were it not for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, given to us by the Holy Spirit, the Helper whom He has sent to us, we would not have peace with our God, but ferocious justice and wrath because of the stain of sin which we carry. But thanks be to God for His great mercy, for the gift of peace which He has given to us by the blood of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. The gift of peace which He leaves us is a gift of faith, without which we cannot receive the benefit of such a wondrous blessing.

And in that faith, we receive His peace in the means of grace—in the gift of His Word and Holy Sacraments. In the washing of water and the Spirit, we were claimed as God's own children, marked as His adopted sons in the blood of the Lamb who was slain. In the eating and drinking of His very body and blood, we are tangibly and concretely given the forgiveness of all of our sins for the sake of the One who suffered the punishment of those sins that we might have eternal life in the Father's house. Jesus proclaiming that you are forgiven for all of your sins, is His peace He gives to us. That is the peace He leaves with us. It is the assurance that despite our human frailty in our sinful flesh, He has done all that is necessary to declare us righteous before His Father in heaven. And because of that blessed truth, which we know only by the faith brought to us by His helper the Holy Spirit, we will join Him in His holy city—the New Jerusalem shining with the glory of God—to make our home with Him in His Father's house, in the glorious light of His love for all eternity. Amen.