

5.22.2022 Easter 6 (Senior Sunday)

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 16:9-15, Psalm 67, Rev. 21:10,22-22:5, John 14:23-29

“My peace I give to you”

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. *Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia!* As we get closer to the festival of Pentecost the readings look toward the coming of the Spirit and the hope of a new heaven and earth. In today’s gospel, Jesus promises to send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who will teach and lead us, and he also speaks of peace, saying, “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you, I do not give to you as the world gives.*” Today is also Senior Sunday, a day that we celebrate the accomplishments of our high school graduating seniors, Davis, Michael, Jonathan and Alice. Though Alice could not be here today, we will honor her with her parents on June 5th.

Speaking of peace, Jesus invites us to see that though life today is remarkably different from life in the ancient world, the world’s understanding of peace has not really changed. We still understand peace as the absence of war. The Roman idea of peace is still very much alive today. The Latin maxim, “*Si vis pacem, para bellum*” (If you desire peace, prepare for war) is alive and well in our modern world. If nothing else, the war in Ukraine has made this much clear: in this world, preparing for peace means preparing for war. We continue to see this concept carried out in international alliances and in the hope that military preparedness will deter war.

In 1911, amidst an era of rising nationalism that led to the First World War, an era not wholly dissimilar to our own, Japanese theologian Uchimura Kanzo wrote of the origin of modern wars in an essay titled, *Will peace really come to this world?* Uchimura wrote,

The origin of war is not political; it not is it economic. It is moral; indeed it is religious.

The origin of war that we continue to see manifested in today’s international wars, is really the spirit of Cain who killed his brother Abel.

The first murder, the first war upon a fellow human being, was not nation against nation, it occurred when a brother killed his own brother.

And yet the peace that Jesus speaks of is entirely different. Jesus gives his peace to humanity precisely because humanity is at war with itself. It is the human heart, broken by sin, that sees in its neighbor, not a sister or a brother, but an enemy. Jesus’ words about peace reveal that his peace is something altogether different from that of the world.

The peace that Jesus gives is in Greek, *eirene*, which means to reconnect, to put back together what has been divided. Jesus' peace is the living power reconnecting a broken humanity to God and to one's neighbor. The peace that Jesus gives always seeks to restore the sacred brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity that had been lost when Cain killed his brother Abel – when Cain killed the one person he should have sought to protect.

I would also like to address our graduates throughout today's message. Davis, Michael, and Jonathan, never underestimate the peace that Jesus gives. Peace is not simply a warm fuzzy feeling. The peace of Jesus is an active power, which will help you remake and reconnect human community when all has been divided. The peace of Jesus restores the divine image in you and in your neighbor. As young people, I ask you to live for and work for peace, helping reconcile broken relationships and reshaping the world throughout your lives.

Jesus is also anticipating Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is God's Spirit of advocacy and counsel. The Advocate, or Paraclete, is the helper who teaches and reminds us of what is right, so that we can become advocates for others. Jesus is suggesting that through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will be guided, becoming advocates for the peace and justice of our neighbor and this world.

This makes our daily prayer life crucial in remaining connected to Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Though our world has become an ever noisier and distracted place, prayer is a way of quieting and focusing ourselves so that we might hear the voice of the Holy Spirit seeking to lead and help us.

Davis, Michael, and Jonathan, what I am trying to say, is to be consistent in your prayer life. Just as you have used your intellect and begun to master certain disciplines in school, I encourage you to not forget your spirit. As you leave your teen years, you will begin to be challenged in new ways that you could not have imagined. It is not a cliché to say, "take everything to God in prayer," because prayer is the power for living. Prayer will open you to the Holy Spirit, helping you envision God's kingdom drawing near to you here on earth as it is in heaven.

Today's reading from Revelation also offers humanity a vision of God's kingdom we can strive for here on earth. John writes, "*The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.*" Try to envision a world where the nations and their leaders are guided by the divine light of God, not for selfish or nationalistic purposes, but to offer the glory of their gifts to God and to one another.

Can you envision a world where the gates of the kingdom are left open, where the borders are not shut? John's Revelation continues to resonate with us because we live in fear of our borders, in fear of the Other. We even try to close the gates and borders of heaven against those whom we do not like, or whom we view as different. The spirit of this world, the spirit of war upon our sisters and brothers continues as we judge and oppress others, invoking God's name upon them.

Yet Jesus says, "*My peace leave with you, I do not give to you as the world gives.*" The peace of Jesus gives us the courage to overcome the oppressive powers of this world. The Spirit led peace of Jesus helps us envision a world reconnected in peace as sisters and brothers, children of God.

Davis, Michael, and Jonathan, I encourage you to make friends at university with all the diversity of people whom you will encounter. You will meet a diversity of people much wider than what you have experienced so far in your lives. Take time to get to know, not only with those who seem most like you, but also those who seem most different, knowing that in God they are sisters and brothers. The world will never tell you that the secret to receiving this peace is to learn to become quiet. Learn to listen to your heart and conscience, for it is there that the Holy Spirit dwells. Each day, take time to turn off your technology and listen to the reality of God's presence in prayer.

Jesus' gift of his peace and the sending of the Holy Spirit should inspire us all to envision a world where all nations offer their gifts to God and to one another here one earth as it is in heaven. If the kingdom of heaven has drawn near in Jesus, then its light and open gates for all people, has also drawn near. As individuals and as a church, we are to point to this kingdom.

The church is to envision a world with no war, a world with open borders and gates. We are to point to and model a community where people care for and help one another, encouraging them to offer their unique gifts of nation and culture to God and for others.

Jesus gives us his peace so that, together, we might become his peace in this often broken and unjust world. Jesus gives his peace so that, as individuals and the church, we might treat all people, no matter their ethnicity, gender, identity or culture, as fellow sisters and brothers.

Jesus says, "*My peace I leave to you; my peace I give to you.*" Be peacemakers in this world. Look upon this world with the eyes of Jesus – the eyes of peace – as the object of God's love.

Jesus says, "*My peace I give to you.*" So live that when you die, others will say, "All she left us, all he gave us, was the peace of Jesus.

Jesus gives his peace to this world through you. Amen.