

5.25.2025 Easter 6

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 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.*

God’s vision of peace and welcome to all nations and peoples invites the question, “From where or to whom do you look for a vision of peace and welcome among the nations today? It is readily apparent that nations and people have a hard time creating peace and welcoming difference. Yet the ancient texts appointed for today continue to offer a vision for peace and fellowship between God, nations and peoples.

Many of us are probably familiar with the ancient Latin words, “*Si vis pacem, para bellum*,” meaning, “If you desire peace, prepare for war.” We struggle with the creation of peace because we continually link peace with war and a culture of war. Jesus’ words in today’s gospel urge us to recognize that his peace is wholly different from any peace given by the world. Jesus’ words, “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives*” recognize that the world’s peace is not the same as the peace Jesus gives. Jesus gives peace because he himself is peace. Jesus doesn’t simply announce a new age of peace – he is peace for every age.

What is the peace that Jesus gives? In Greek, the word Jesus uses is *eirene* (εἰρήνη), meaning to connect or unite what has been divided. His peace reconciles and unites the hearts of people and nations that have been divided by war, religion, politics, and human injustice. Because Jesus was Jewish, the peace he gives is *shalom*. The *shalom* of God is wholeness of body, mind, and spirit that unites people with God and with one another. The peace that Jesus gives is the peace of the one who slept in a boat during a storm on a lake. Jesus is God’s abiding presence amid life’s storms, challenges, and even war.

We live much of our lives on the choppy surface of the lake, so to speak. Jesus’ peace, however, plunges us deeply into the deep and still waters of baptism so we might live for and help those who are tossed about on the stormy surface of the world. The peace of Jesus is not a temporary peace, a pause between wars, but an abiding peace that overcomes the world’s divisions and hatreds.

I think Lydia in today’s reading from Acts experienced the deep and abiding peace of Jesus. Lydia is often called the “first European Christian” because she was baptized by Paul and his companions when they arrived in Philippi in the Roman colony of Macedonia. God’s peace allowed Paul to sit in peace with a group of women who had gathered by a river for prayer. The peace of Jesus opened Lydia’s heart to hear the gospel, leading Lydia and her household to baptism.

What we have here is the story of God’s peace crossing the boundaries of oceans and the borders of nations to unite people who had been divided under the Roman Empire. The peace that Lydia

experienced not only united her with God, but it also led her to welcome strangers into her home. The peace of Jesus leads us to open the doors of the church in Christian hospitality. This is why we create partnerships in our community, building circles of friendship around our church. This is why we open our doors on Sunday to all who seek to hear and know the peace of Jesus Christ.

We cannot create peace without knowing his peace. We cannot be united with the stranger without recognizing that we too have been strangers in need of his peace. Jesus' peace transcends the world's brokenness with a vision of human unity. Jesus gives peace because he is peace, and his peace creates a community of peace called the church.

Lydia's story has been repeated over and over throughout the past two thousand years because Jesus lives raised and alive offering peace to all people and nations. Have you ever been a stranger in need of peace or a foreigner in a foreign land in need of welcome and fellowship? For nearly thirty years I lived as a stranger and foreigner in another nation. Yet I am not unusual, my life has been mirrored by countless immigrants and expatriates, refugees and displaced people seeking the peaceful fellowship of *shalom*. The church exists in this world as a bridge between heaven and earth offering God's peace and fellowship to all people.

This vision of heaven on earth is nowhere better articulated than in Revelation's vision of true human community. This vision is not simply a pie-in-the-sky hope for a future we may or may not know; it is a very real vision to live into each day. The biblical vision of peace never comes about through war or the culture of war. Revelation's vision of peace brings the nations of the world together in the light of Christ so we might all offer the gifts of our nations to God and to one another. Rarely do I hear global leaders speak of a divine peace that transcends our national differences. Rarely do I hear leaders speak of our shared humanity and common need for a divine water of life that sustains peace. Rarely do I hear leaders acknowledge a divine peace that heals the nations allowing us to offer our gifts to God and to one another.

Every year, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is observed during the week of January 18-25. One January, some years ago at the conclusion of this week of prayer, I was invited to speak to the Jesuit community at Sophia University in Tokyo. The Jesuit community at Sophia is comprised of brothers and priests from around the world – Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe, and North America. I knew all of them were fluent in English, but nevertheless I prepared my remarks in Japanese, the common language of the nation in which we were all working.

At the end of the prayer service held in the chapel of the SJ House on the university campus, I remember an older priest from Belgium greeting me with open arms, saying, "We are all brothers in Christ!" Like that community, we also gather today in this sanctuary as brothers and sisters in Christ. We are people of many different backgrounds and nations, all offering our gifts to God and

one another. We are a church welcoming all nations, ethnicities, genders, identities, and abilities. As Lydia opened her home to strangers and new friends in Christ, we open our doors to all people because we know the reconciling peace of Jesus Christ.

Because God so loves the world, the peace of Christ crosses borders and boundaries. Peace is the outcome of God's reconciling love for all people. Nations can outlaw ethnicities and identities, but they cannot outlaw God's love. Nations can close their borders, but the love of God crosses all borders with a peace that makes brothers and sisters of all nations and peoples.

I grew up in a very diverse neighborhood of Chicago, a real "United-Nations-neighborhood" so to speak. When I went south on Clark Street toward Uptown, the languages of the world were represented on the signage of the shops and stores, and it was in that community that the church existed. The church I grew up in opened its doors to all people, because God welcomes all people with open arms. This church was led in ministry by my father, who helped start Chinese and Arabic speaking congregations, welcoming them as partners in mission in that diverse community.

Why does the church do this? Why does the church insist upon welcoming and loving others? Jesus' words in today's gospel reveal the reason: "*Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.*" God makes a home in the hearts of all who love God and who love others because the heart is the home of peace.

To have God in your heart is to know peace. Jesus gives you a peace that overcomes the borders and differences of the world. Jesus' peace welcomes strangers as his brothers and sisters.

In a world badly in need of peace, Jesus makes his home in you so that in peace you might open your arms to the world. Amen.