

John 14:23-29

23 Jesus answered him, “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.

24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.”

25 I have said these things to you while I am still with you.

26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

27 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.

28 You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.

29 And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

Sermon: My Peace I Give to You

Goodbyes are never easy. Not even for Jesus. Jesus comes to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival, and Jesus knows exactly what is coming next: a trial and certain death.

But the disciples do not yet understand. How could they? If like them, we had lived in the constant, tangible presence of Jesus, witnessed his mighty deeds, and experienced his abundance, would we ever expect him to leave? And even if we did, would we be well-equipped to handle his absence? Doubtful. Goodbyes are never easy.

Jesus knows his sudden departure will be jarring for the disciples. But Jesus will not leave them ill-equipped to face their future. Jesus leaves them with a gift. Actually...gifts.

These gifts are not only used by the earliest disciples, but they are still being used today. By our community, and by every other Christian community.

The four main Gospel accounts vary about the nature of Jesus' parting gift. Matthew, Mark and Luke all agree that the parting gift is a meal. Remember, we read about it on Maundy Thursday.

Before the storm of Friday morning, Jesus gathers the disciples, named and unnamed, all of them together, for a simple Passover meal of bread and wine. Jesus breaks a loaf of bread and shares it. "Take and eat," Jesus says, "This is my body for you."

Next, Jesus pours wine into a cup. And Jesus shares the wine, too. "This is my lifeforce," Jesus says. "It represents my earnest covenant with you."

And each time you share in this meal, I'm gonna be there. This do, all of it, in remembrance of me."

Jesus is telling the disciples that each time they gather together in fellowship, and break bread in God's name, the presence of Jesus will be among them. And it is. Each time we celebrate Communion, we recall the cramped, simple quarters of friends sharing a meal, and Christ's spirit travels through space and time to join us, to sustain us, to comfort us.

Communion. Eucharist. The Last Supper. This is the familiar version of the goodbye gift, not only in our scriptures, but also in our rituals. And it's a really good gift to be sure.

But this morning, we'll focus our attention on the goodbye gift of John's gospel. It may be less familiar, but it's no less valuable.

In John's telling of the story, just like in the synoptic gospels, Jesus anticipates the pending trial. But Jesus' last moments with the disciples are not around the Passover meal. Instead, John's gospel frames Jesus' goodbye message inside of a two-and-a-half-chapter-long discourse that happens *after* dinner. We're never told *where* this discourse happens. Perhaps it's on a walk from the upper room to the garden; perhaps it's in a quiet space; perhaps Jesus told the slow eaters to take a baguette and a wine-toter to-go. Wherever the setting, I believe it's safe to assume Jesus and the disciples were in a comfortable, but private space. I like to imagine a stoop or a front porch, or someplace where the real conversations occur.

And here's what Jesus, says:

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 your hearts be afraid.

For the Evangelist, Jesus' final gift is peace, but not the kind we so often associate with.

Yes, peace can be the absence of conflict: an end to warring or fighting or violence.

The peace Jesus offers is different. It's bigger and broader. This peace is a presence and a resolve. This peace steadies our anxiety, sustains our confidence.

Think back to the life and ministry of Jesus. One day on a stormy sea, a fishing boat is being battered by waves, and the disciples are terrified. But Jesus says, "Peace! Be Still!" And the winds cease. And there is peace.

One day, it's getting late in the afternoon, and a large crowd has gathered, and the disciples are anxious about how they will feed all these people. Jesus gifts the disciples and the crowd (and us as well!) the peace that comes with cooperation and sharing: five loaves and two fish are always more than enough in the presence of God! And there is peace!

At a well in Samaria, Jesus offers an estranged woman the peace of community; in the home of Mary and Martha, Jesus offers peace in the midst of daily distractions; at the death of Lazarus, Jesus offers the peace of friendship and the hope of God's possibilities; and even after

his death, Jesus appears to a group of frightened disciples in a dark, dank room, and proclaims: “Peace be with you!”

Jesus of Nazareth loves God. Fully, wholly, completely. And in this love, Jesus finds inner peace. This peace allows Jesus to be confident in the power of God, a power that nothing, not even the might of Rome, nor the sting of death can overcome. And so...Jesus lives with what’s called a non-anxious presence: the ability to trust, that even in conflict, even in crisis, even in uncertainty, God will be present and active.

Here’s another way to describe Jesus’ sense of non-anxious presence. Jesus is one who proclaims with confidence: “The Lord is my shepherd. Therefore, I shall not want.”

In the last moments of his ministry, Jesus tells the disciples that the peace he’s given to them in the past, is the same peace he’ll give to them in the present and in the future.

“Yes,” Jesus says:

There will be conflict. Yes, there will be uncertainty. Yes, there will be grief and pain and hunger and other calamities. But amid all of this, there will also be peace. There will be a presence that steadies you and strengthens you. This is my gift to you. So do not let your hearts be troubled, because this is a gift that has no expiration.

Friends, the peace of Christ, John’s farewell gift, is a gift that resides in each of us. And this gift has power! It steadies us to enter places and eras we never imagined we could: hospital waiting rooms; funeral parlors, S.A.T. exams, uncomfortable dinner tables; adulthood, middle-

age, old age; Church in a post-Covid world; America in 2025: places where fear and grief and anxiety and uncertainty and heartache and doubt and unhealed wounds can overwhelm us. This peace tells us we are not alone. This peace tells us God is present, always working to infuse healing in ways seen and unseen.

And this peace of Christ, it also verifies our worth. The same inner peace that dwelled, still dwells in Jesus, it also dwells in each of us. Peace tells us that despite our doubts, despite our self-perceived flaws and faults, God is eager to work with us and through us.

Just as we still share the meal the disciples first shared together in the act of Eucharist, we also share the peace that was shared with them in a quiet corner of Jerusalem.

We perform this act every Sunday morning when we proclaim: "May the Peace of Christ be with you." And our neighbors respond: "And also with you."

Hear that again. Christ shares the gift of peace with the earliest disciples. And because Christ shared it with them, it means we, too, share in God's peace. It means we can give and receive Christ's peace to and from one another.

And in recognition of such a gift, we proclaim: Hallelujah and Thanks be to God!

Friends, the Peace of Christ be with you, this day and every day! Amen.