

6th Sunday of Easter “The Gift of Peace Only the Lord Can Give”

Bishop Frank Schuster

Jesus tells his disciples before his passion, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” Jesus’ gift of “peace” to his disciples at this moment in the Gospel can feel incongruous, to say the least. He is about to be betrayed, tortured and crucified. Here is a parable I like that, for me, articulates the kind of peace Jesus is talking about. The parable is entitled “Painting Peace”. The author is anonymous as far as I can tell and there are several versions of it out there.¹ This one begins like this.

There once was a King who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried. The King looked at all the pictures, but there were only two he really liked, and he had to choose between them. One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror, for peaceful towering mountains were all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace. The other picture had mountains too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky from which rain fell and in which lightening played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This did not look peaceful at all. But when the King looked, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird in [that] nest. [And, despite her surroundings, she looked perfectly peaceful].

Which picture do you think won the prize? The King [obviously] chose the second picture. “Because” explained the King, “Peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart.”

I love this parable for the only reason that, for me, it points a finger at what I think Jesus is getting at in our Gospel reading today. Let’s hear him again. Jesus says to his disciples, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” Like I said in the beginning, Jesus is offering this gift of peace only hours before he would be betrayed, and Jesus knew that his disciples were going to scatter in fear. What is this gift of peace Jesus is offering them? I think it is the peace of that bird on a cliff taking shelter from a hurricane. You see, the peace Jesus is offering us clearly does not come from the world. It comes from within, and it comes from him.

I mention this because I imagine many of us here today wouldn’t describe their lives as particularly peaceful right now. Whether it is the worry we have of the latest news going on in the country or world around us, a messy bedroom or kitchen, the unresolved conflicts at work or at home, perhaps a disagreement before church today as you were driving here in the car, or perhaps a medical condition we or a loved one is struggling with, or the grief we experience with a heartbreaking loss, the list goes on, we come to church sometimes with a lot of baggage. And Jesus offers us peace. He offers us

¹ I found this version at <https://storiesforpreaching.com/category/sermonillustrations/peace/>.

peace. However, Jesus does not offer his disciples worldly peace, does he? Like I said, it comes from within, and it comes from him.

And notice that something very strange happened to these disciples after Jesus offered them this gift of peace. After the Last Supper and the events on Good Friday, these disciples went from fleeing in every direction and denying even knowing Jesus to risking their lives in the public squares proclaiming the resurrection. Something happened to these disciples for them to go from desertion to evangelization in such a short period of time. Let me focus on two things that can explain such a quick change in behavior.

First, Jesus really did rise from the dead on the third day just like he said he would. Nothing short of the fact of Jesus' resurrection could explain the disciple's quick turn around in behavior. Jesus Christ rose from the dead, appeared before the disciples, and their lives were changed forever. Secondly, Jesus gave the disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost which we will celebrate in a couple of weeks. The peace of the Holy Spirit is a peace that helped these disciples persevere in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. It is the peace that changed these disciples into apostles, going from desertion to evangelization, even when it meant that their lives would be endangered for proclaiming the Gospel. Like I said, it is the kind of peace that can weather any storm.

What does this gift of peace look like for us? It is the kind of peace that helps us to desire serving others rather than serving ourselves, even when we are never thanked for it. It is the kind of peace that prefers patience and understanding over the prideful need to win every verbal argument. It is the kind of peace that can even return violence with love and give us the grace to turn the other cheek, at home, at work, at school and in our community. It is also the kind of peace that gives us permission to ask for forgiveness from others or from the Lord when we need it. It is the kind of peace that gives us permission to be forgiven by others, by the Lord, and by ourselves too.

You see, it is kind of peace that can help us withstand any storm that this life can throw at us, no matter how difficult life can be. My friends, peace is a supernatural gift from the Lord. I really believe that. Peace comes from within, and it comes from him. However, I also believe that we can't receive this gift of peace from the Lord unless we give ourselves permission to choose it. We have to want it. My friends, as we receive the Prince of Peace in the Holy Eucharist today, the invitation this weekend is to open our hearts to the gift of peace Jesus wants to give us right now, today, a peace that will help us be faithful in good times and in bad, a peace that will help us weather any storm the world can throw at us, a peace that will lead us to salvation through Christ our Lord.