

## Peace

*“When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like a sea billows roll;  
whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, ‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’”*

If asked we might define peace in a variety of ways. We can define it as the lack of conflict or aggression, as we might define world peace. We could define peace as security—the security to be able to walk the streets safely at night. Or we might describe peace as a feeling of satisfaction or contentment in our personal lives.

Regardless of how we define, envision or describe it, what we seem to want most is peace, but it seems to elude us an awful lot of the time; we still live with restlessness and fear, we still live with anxiety and worry.

Sunday we will encounter Jesus as he stands, once again, in the upper room with his fearful disciples. They have been told about Jesus' resurrection appearance from those who traveled with him on the road to Emmaus, but as he appears in the upper room their initial response is one of terror and disbelief.

Certainly their fearful joy is born of trying to reconcile two irreconcilable facts—that Jesus was dead and somehow he is now incredibly present!

We, like those early followers, must learn to trust that Jesus' very real presence is still alive and at work in the world. His life force is so strong that he has somehow conquered the powers of death and darkness so that we can live in the light. In the Light of Christ no doubt or fear need ever again have power over us.

This is the peace that Jesus brings.

This peace is not the mere absence of conflict. Jesus comes to his disciples in a world that knows severe conflict and violence. Nor is the peace Jesus brings a false security. Jesus sends the disciples out into a world that is often hostile to their message; indeed, many of these early followers will die violent deaths.

No, the peace that Jesus brings is rooted in the Hebrew concept of Shalom. I have spoken to you before about the concept of Shalom---that state of social and spiritual completeness and abundance that is not dependent upon the absence of conflict or our material needs and circumstances. Jesus himself was God's peace in the flesh---Jesus' life is the perfect expression of shalom.

Jesus teaches us that true peace, God's peace, does not mean the *absence* of struggle; God's peace promises the presence of love *within* the struggle. True peace does not begin with job security, contentment, or happiness, although these are wonderful things.

God's peace is far more substantial. It begins with a deep thanksgiving and gratitude that springs from a constant awareness that God's power to heal and give hope is alive and among us, here, now, always and that through the power of the Holy Spirit we receive the sustenance, guidance, courage and compassion to be peacemakers in the world.

This is a peace that moves out from us like ripples in water. This peace flows from the trust that Jesus has taught us what we need to know to heal our pain. This peace gives us the courage to be reconcilers in our families and communities.

Jesus' bidding of “Peace be with you” continually calls us away from the anger, violence and conflict born of mistrust and fear.

The peace of Christ pulls us toward forgiveness, grace and generosity. It calls us to be people of continual grace and forgiveness, and in that forgiveness our burdens of fear and anxiety are lifted. This is the way we heal our families, our church and the world in which we live.

Fear, loss, anger and resentments happen---they happen all the time. But, we are the ones who decide if these things will become a prison or a way of life. If you are caught in any of these traps know that Jesus offers a better way.

He stands among us to say, "Peace be with you."

You are witnesses to these things, Jesus will tell us on Sunday. He will remind us that we are to take God's peace into our own hearts and then out into the world, having witnessed it and known it among ourselves we can then offer it to others.

God's peace is not after all simply the silence of guns after the battle or a promise that we will never know sadness or dramatic change in our lives. It *is* the joy of Christ's reconciling love *painfully* embraced in the midst of our most difficult times or relationships. Jesus' peace is an unassailable witness to God's love for all of humankind.

The current climate of our nation and world is rife and ripe with conflict and opportunities for hate and entrenchment. Think about where this destructive cycle has you hooked, where you are most conflicted and torn and then remember that the first thing Jesus offered his followers was this astounding gift of peace. Be fearless and brave and be reconciled in your heart and minds that there is a better way, not an easier way, but a better way.

May God's Peace fill you and keep you and lead you into the cycle of unending grace, may it lead you to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul."

Happy Easter,

Stephanie+