

Easter 6, 2010
Good Hope Lutheran Church
John 14: 27

Jesus was speaking and Jesus said, Peace I leave with you, my own peace I give you. I do not give you as the world gives. Therefore do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

The word of God. And we pray:
In the midst of a troubled world, Lord Jesus we pray for the gift of your heavenly peace. We do not ask to be spared every difficulty or bailed out of every jam. We ask always and only for you. Be with us Lord, to forgive and to guide. Give us faith and hope, and fill our hearts with a vision of heaven, the better to live our lives here on earth. Lord Jesus in your name we pray, AMEN.

Just exactly what do we mean by peace, anyway. Peace, the peace of God, the peace that passes all human understanding—we pray for it. We proclaim it. We hope for it, and long for it, and apparently think we can spread it around a little bit just by shaking hands—“The peace of the Lord be with you always, and also with you,” nice; but what is it? What do we here mean, by peace.

Is peace for example simply the absence of war? Is that it? Jesus Christ died and rose again about the year 35 A.D. The New Testament was written, and the Church was planted, between 35 and 100 A.D. And all those years were part of a two century span referred to as the Pax Romana—the famous Roman peace, two centuries during which the Mediterranean world had

virtually no war. Impressive. Give the Romans credit, no one else has ever been able to do that, certainly in the modern age we have never gone that long without war. But was the Roman peace, really peace? True, there were few if any wars, but basically that's because all possible enemies had already been killed. I mean look at what happened to Jesus—proclaimed as king on Palm Sunday, dead on a cross the following Friday, that's no accident! That's how the Roman peace worked. A brutally efficient military dictatorship, it would have made Saddam Hussein jealous. So is that what *we* mean, by peace?

In America today, we probably can't forge a Roman style peace in the world—and probably don't want to try. So, many of us settle instead for what I'd call the Pax Suburbana—the suburban peace, where I know there is anguish out there, I know there are problems and pain, but my kids are doing ok, and my hometown seems fine, and look! No dandelions in my front yard! Since we can't control the world, well, let's shrink the world down to a size maybe we can control, and let's just be happy with that. Trouble is, no matter how narrow your world becomes, you can't control it. You can't. There are problems even here and supposing for a moment your little world *does* look pretty good—is *that* what we mean by peace? A very *private* sort of happiness? How can you call that peace and be satisfied with it—when

you know your neighbor is in need?

Against the Pax Romana and the Pax Suburbana stands the peace of Jesus Christ—a far, far different reality. We proclaim the peace of Jesus Christ, and obviously we do not mean that war has ended—*but it will*. It will, and not because all of our enemies are dead, but because they won't be our enemies any more! Jesus died and rose again, the cross is now the symbol of a new kind of victory. Forgiveness, reconciliation, love, mercy—these are not just pretty words in a green hymnal. It's not just a nice thought, good luck with that one. No, this is the way our God will win, it's the way our God has won, the peace of Christ means there will be no more enemies, because He died and rose again for them too, and He intends to take all of them—and make one great big us.

The peace of Christ does not mean all's well with the world today—again, obviously, all is not well. But it will be. It's not that we ignore the poor and turn a blind eye to the hungry till they finally, finally just give up and go away. Rather, they won't be poor and hungry anymore. They won't be lost and lonely anymore, they won't be on the outside looking in anymore! People everywhere are and will be welcomed, fed, housed, loved, cared for—by the Lord and savior of us all, Jesus Christ in His name.

The peace of Christ is for us “a foretaste of the feast to come.” It is the

present experience of a still future reality. Hmm? The present experience of a future reality, we are not in heaven yet but we are so sure we will be—we get to start acting like it now. The peace of Christ always and inevitably begins in a very personal way, in each of us. My sins are forgiven, because of Jesus who died and rose again. My slate is wiped clean, my past is erased, my future is promised, and my habits. Ego, anger, envy, gossip, you name it, my habits one by one, step by step; are broken; my relationships slowly but surely are renewed, and my life. My life is less my life, and more His, each day. The peace of Christ is a very personal thing, for every believer, at first.

But if it stays merely personal, it is not the peace of Christ—it's the pax suburbana in a Sunday morning suit. See, because I know God has me covered, I can quit worrying about me, and start caring for you, and for the world. Because we know God has us covered, and will forever, well we can take on the world in His name, it's ok, really and truly, what is there to lose? Jesus said today, Let your not your hearts be troubled, let them not be afraid, why? Why, because, when you know you belong to Jesus forever, there's nothing left to be afraid of. When you know you belong to Jesus there's nothing left to be afraid of, we're not in heaven yet. But we're so sure we will be—we're fearless with sharing love today. The peace of God is courage, and confidence, the freedom we've been given to live like we're in

heaven now, even though we're still on earth.

In the legend of King Arthur, there was this guy Merlin. And the thing about Merlin, he went through time backwards. Most people remember the past but Merlin, he remembered the future. Neat concept. Well that's a Christian for you, that's the peace of God, we here are people who remember the future. Jesus wins. His kingdom comes, and His will shall be done, and we remember that as if was tomorrow. And we live like it was today. That would be a glimpse of the peace of Jesus Christ, and it is my prayer for you all now, in Jesus' name AMEN.