

Sixth Weekend of Easter (RCL/C): "Peace I Leave With You"
John 14:23-29
May 25-26, 2019
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

How many times have we heard someone say, "Don't worry about it!" and we've thought, "Easy for **you** to say!"

Think over the last week: what has made you anxious, either a little or a lot? Maybe it's been a good week and you've pretty much stayed on an even keel. Or maybe some doozy of a personal or professional issue has pulled the plug on your sense of well-being and you've been emotionally circling the drain. Even if our up-close-and-personal world is in good shape, there's always the nation and the world to worry about: here at home the talk of a possible constitutional crisis is unsettling, to say the least; across the Pond, Theresa May has announced her resignation as Great Britain's prime minister; healthcare workers in the Ebola-infected Congo are being attacked by the people they're trying to help; Botswana has lifted its ban on the killing of elephants, despite the fact they're endangered; and on it goes.

Jesus had a few things to worry about the night before He died: like the fact that it was His **Last** Supper since crucifixion awaited Him the next day. And yet, as we heard in today's Gospel, He was working overtime at that Last Supper to comfort **His friends**:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."
(John 14:27c)

He wasn't giving them some lame, "You have nothing to worry about; everything's going to work out" speech. He wasn't giving them a pep talk. He was giving them a gift:

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.
I do not give to you as the world gives."* (John 14:27a-b)

This God-given peace isn't the absence of conflict: it's the presence of calm in the midst of conflict. Almost certainly the word Jesus used for peace is the Hebrew *shalom*: well-being of body and soul that isn't governed by external factors, can't be shaken by outside forces, but is a rock-solid gift of God for those who believe. The peace Jesus gives to His community of faith is the fruit of the gift of eternal life. This peace proceeds from the presence of the divine Life within us:

*"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."*

John 14:23

When we live in love, when we obey God's commands out of love, God moves in with us.

Our 4th evangelist who wrote this magnificent "Last Supper Speech" portrays a Lord who doesn't accept, "I love You, Lord, but...." "I love You, Lord, but let's be reasonable about how much You expect of me." "I love You, Lord, but my life is busy and there's simply no time left for worship." "I love You, Lord, but I've got to look out for my own interests and not that of others when I enter the voting booth." "I love You, Lord, but faith is fine for weekends, not so much for the work week, fine for the sanctuary, not so much for the office" -- ??

*"Those who love me will keep my word,
and my Father will love them,
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It's funny: the heavenly peace that passes understanding **calms** us in the midst of conflict, allowing us to trust in God's care despite the dangers around and within us – but God's love and presence in our hearts **disturbs** us when it comes to the suffering of others.

Our faith is very personal but it is **not** intended to be private. Jesus is addressing a community of disciples at this Last Supper, not a random group of individuals. The promises He makes, the gifts He gives, are for the community as a whole. And so we regularly need to ask as a family of faith, “Are we loving God by keeping God’s word?” God’s word is that we should love God above all else and love our neighbor as ourselves. Are we faithfully and consistently doing that? Are we responsive to the suffering of God’s children nearby and far away? Do we work not just to alleviate suffering but to prevent it? In addition to giving food and clothes, money and shelter, do we address the root causes of hunger and homelessness through advocacy? Is the faith of our faith family fruitful in love?? We who gather for this Lord’s Supper are not a random group of individuals any more than the guests at the Last Supper were. We are a family of faith. Jesus’ promise is for us, too:

*“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.”*

The Scripture read at graveside before burial or in the memorial garden before inurnment or interment of cremains is often from the beginning of this 14th chapter of St. John’s Gospel:

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled...
In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.
If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?
And if I go to prepare a place for you,
I will come again and will take you to myself,
so that where I am, you may be also....”* John 14:1-3

'Sure sounds like a promise for the future. And it **is** immensely comforting when parting from a loved one who has died. It's a reminder the person hasn't been sucked into a black hole but has been welcomed Home and is surrounded by love and light.

In today's Gospel Jesus says we can be Home with the Lord even now: **if** we love and obey. We will experience the peace that passes understanding; we will live in love; Father, Son and Holy Spirit will dance not just **within** us but **among** us in this family of faith **if** we live a community life of faith-active-in-love.

Our worldly anxiety over things we can't control will be calmed and our distress for those in need will be increased to the point where we act on their behalf. We don't have to wait for Heaven to live in God's presence, enjoying divine shalom, holy love and take-your-breath-away joy. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham