

Peace I Leave with You

John 14:23-29 (NIV)

²³ Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. ²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. ²⁸ "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.

Analysts today are saying that we are living in the most peaceful era of human history. How can that be? Daily we hear about violent crimes, homicides, and the like. We hear about civil unrest and terrorist attacks. We live in a post 9-11 world. Some would say that we are living in the most dangerous and most violent of times. However, when you step back and look at the whole picture, there is credible information that the analysts are giving. Violent crimes have decreased significantly over the last 20 years. The least amount of countries are engaged in formal war than in the last century. And in most years more people are killed by bee stings and as a result of hitting a deer than are killed by terrorists. For these reasons, we can admit that we live in one of the most peaceful times in human history. Yet so many are afraid. So many are troubled. This doesn't feel like a peaceful time to be living.

Jesus' disciples knew that same feeling. They lived during a time called the *Pax Romana*, a period of history of almost 2 centuries when the Roman Empire ruled most of Western civilization. Now, sure, there were still wars being fought by the Romans to increase their borders and expand the Empire, but most nations, including Israel, enjoyed relative peace because they were under Roman rule, Roman protection, and war was not breaching their borders.

The *Pax Romana* is not really what the Jews, including Jesus' disciples, had in mind when it came to thinking about an era of peace. They had put their hopes, their faith, on an era of peace ushered in by the promised Messiah, their promised Savior. They knew the prophecies, that a king would rise from the stump of Jesse and would establish a kingdom that would never end. Many Jews thought that this meant that their Messiah would rescue them from the hands of the Romans and that they would never be subjugated to foreign rule again. They would never have to worry because their Messiah would take care of all their problems.

But on this Maundy Thursday night, a new fear was creeping into the disciples' lives, a fear that Jesus had warned them about but now they were being forced to confront. "You heard me say, 'I am going away.'" (verse 28) Jesus is going to leave them. For the past three years their lives had centered around Jesus. He was the one they looked to, the one they believed would be their deliverer. They believed that he would establish a kingdom on earth. This idea that Jesus was now going to leave them left them with unfulfilled hopes and dreams, an undelivered kingdom. They would be alone in this world, at the mercy of the world. Jesus' disciples were troubled and afraid as to what would happen to them when Jesus left.

We can understand the disciples being troubled and afraid. There are things in this world that trouble us, unsettle us, make us afraid. As the presidential election looms this coming November, you're afraid of who will take office. Will they run this country into the ground? Will they enact laws and make bills that will take away your freedoms? Will they trample your religious rights as a citizen of this country? Will they cause war to break out? Will diplomacy fail with the new president? Will terrorism find its way back to our shores? Will my voice, my vote, be silenced by so many others who don't think like me, who don't act like me? Are you afraid that you will be fighting the system all by yourself?

That's the global scale. What about on the personal scale? Are you afraid that your loved ones, your friends, your family will leave you, whether by choice or by death? Will these personally important relationships go away? Will they abandon you? Will you be left all alone?

Maybe God will abandon you. Is that message running through your mind in the dark of night? He says that anyone who loves him obeys his teaching. It's those kind of people that he makes a home with. I love him, but I know that I don't always obey his teaching. Will he leave me because of that? Will he abandon me – if not today, maybe later? Will he get fed up with my lack of love and leave me for good?

The truth is, Jesus should abandon me. My love for him cannot just be a feeling that I have for him, a passing thought from time to time. Loving Christ, loving God, is obeying him, keeping his commands, listening to his Word, and not just when I feel like it, but all the time. I haven't done that. Will Jesus abandon me?

Jesus knew that his disciples feared this very same thing. Was Jesus leaving us because we have not obeyed his teachings? That's why he said to them, "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.'" (verse 28) Yes, he is leaving the disciples that very night so that he can go to the cross. By his death, by his resurrection Jesus is on a path to leave his disciples and return to the Father. He is leaving to pay the penalty of our disobedience of his commands, for our lack of love for him. He is leaving them to offer his lifeblood so that he will never abandon them, never leave us all alone because Jesus promised that he would not leave his disciples as orphans. He is going away, and he is coming back. "I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe." (verse 29)

Jesus did come back to his disciples with his resurrection. Jesus comes to us as well. "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." (verse 23) Jesus, God's Son, and God the Father will make a home with everyone who listens to his Word, who believes him and his teachings. He sends you the Holy Spirit so that you believe, so that he can make his home with you. When you believe, God does indeed make his home with you. He dwells with you and within you. To God you are more than just a number, more than just a face in the crowd. God actually lives with you. You are never alone.

This means that whatever you go through, God goes through with you. Whenever you feel like the world is against you, when you are afraid that your voice will be silenced by the majority, when you feel like the world will change on you in a moment's notice and consume you, when you feel like the cessation of hostilities, worldly peace, can vanish at a moment, God is with you through it all. He does not leave you alone. Even though freedoms may be taken away, no one can take God away from you. Wars may rage. People may hate. Laws may change. But God will not abandon you because he has made his home with you. When family and friends leave you, either by choice or by death, God is with you while you go through the separation and the grief. Never are you left to take on the world and your problems by yourself. God will not pack his bags and up and leave you on a whim. He is not fickle. He will always be there for you because he has made his home with you by his teachings, his Word which you have heard, which you listen to and follow.

Knowing that God has made his home with us, this is our peace throughout all those times when our hearts are troubled and we are afraid. This is the peace that Jesus gives us. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (verse 27) Jesus' peace is not fleeting. It cannot be affected by outside forces. No one and no thing can take away your peace from God because God has chosen to make a home with you through his Word.

When your heart is troubled, when you are afraid because you feel that everyone is bearing down on you and you have no support, go back to Jesus' teaching. Go back to the Word of God. It's by Jesus' teaching, his Word, that the Holy Spirit, our Advocate, comes to us. He teaches us and reminds us of all things. He teaches and reminds you that God the Father and God the Son have made a home with you and because of this no one can take away your peace of being with God.

Trust in God and his Word as the antidote to our troubled hearts and to our fear. God gives us this trust by the work of the Holy Spirit, by hearing God's Word, by recalling our baptisms that that was the day when the Holy Spirit made us a dwelling place for God. The Holy Spirit brings God the Father and God the Son to dwell in us as we partake in the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of our sins, spiritual peace with God.

Because God dwells with us, we have his peace with us at all times. This is why we end our worship services with the blessing. It's one more chance for the Holy Spirit to teach and remind you of the peace that God has left you. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (verse 27) That's the peace that the Risen Christ leaves us. Amen.