

Sunday, May 22, 2022 – “Want Peace? Love God”  
– Bible Study & Reflection on Acts 11:1-18

Dear Members & Friends:

I invite you to read the following passage from John 14:23-29 (*Common English Bible*).

<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered, “Whoever loves me will keep my word. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. <sup>24</sup> Whoever doesn’t love me doesn’t keep my words. The word that you hear isn’t mine. It is the word of the Father who sent me.

<sup>25</sup> “I have spoken these things to you while I am with you. <sup>26</sup> The Companion,<sup>[a]</sup> the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you.

<sup>27</sup> “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don’t be troubled or afraid. <sup>28</sup> You have heard me tell you, ‘I’m going away and returning to you.’ If you loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than me. <sup>29</sup> I have told you before it happens so that when it happens you will believe.

This Sunday, we find ourselves in the Farewell Discourse (John, Chapters 14-17) of Jesus to his disciples the night before his death. The one whom the disciples have trusted, believed, and followed is about to leave them. This Farewell Speech is Jesus’ last will and testament to them and takes us to the core of his teaching as found in John’s Gospel.

Jesus has earlier promised not to leave his disciples orphaned (John 14:18). He will send another Companion, the Spirit of truth, to be with them forever (John 14:16) and continue his work among them. Sadly, the world does not recognize the Spirit of truth nor does the world receive the Spirit (John 14:17), just as it did not welcome Jesus. Although the world will no longer see Jesus, he promises that his disciples will see him (John 14:19) because Jesus will reveal himself to them (John 4:21). The disciples will be privileged by being given an inside look into the purposes and work of Jesus.

At this point, Judas (not Judas Iscariot) then asks Jesus, “Lord, why are you about to reveal yourself to us and not to the world?” (John 14:22). This Sunday’s Gospel begins with Jesus’ response to Judas’ question. Perhaps Judas expects that Jesus will give some secret knowledge – in the Greek, *gnosis*. But that’s not what Jesus has in mind.

Jesus says that he and the Father will come and make their “home” (*monein* in Greek, meaning “dwelling”) with those who love Jesus and keep his word (John 14:23). Just eleven verses earlier, Jesus had spoken to his disciples of “many dwellings” – in Greek, *monai pollai* – in his Father’s home, to which Jesus goes to prepare a place for them (John 14:2). Now the stress is on the “home” or “dwelling” coming to the disciples, rather than the disciples coming to it. Jesus is the Word taking on our flesh and tenting (dwelling) with us (John 1). Jesus now promises that he and God will continue to “dwell” with his disciples in the present and into the future.

How? Through the Holy Spirit, also known as the Advocate (Defender), the Companion, the Comforter, the Helper, or the Paraclete (in Greek *paracletos* means “called to come alongside” – funny, isn’t it, how it sometimes takes a few words to describe in English what is described in another language with one word?). Jesus will continue to accompany and lead his disciples. Jesus says that the Father will send the Holy Spirit to be “alongside” his disciples, to teach them

and to remind them of all Jesus has said to them (John 14:26).

Therefore, the disciples should not be anxious: “Don’t let your hearts be troubled” (John 14:1). Later in the same chapter, Jesus reiterates his word of comfort, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don’t be troubled or afraid” (John 14:27). Six chapters after this Farewell Discourse, Jesus will barge in on his fearful disciples after his resurrection. There, he will greet them with “peace” (John 20:19, 21), in Greek, *eirene*, which is undoubtedly meant to be a Greek rendering of the Hebrew greeting, *shalom*. *Shalom* means more than the absence of distress; it is a deep sense of contentment, health, wholeness, and well-being. The world knows nothing of such peace. John Hesselink helps us understand this notion of peace:

To separate “external life” or our “total being” from inner peace is to put asunder what God has joined together in the multifaceted reality we call shalom. For shalom (or eirene) is never simply religious, inner peace of the soul; nor is it primarily the absence of strife or war. In the Old Testament shalom connotes wholeness, well-being, the good life, all of which are a gift of God. In the New Testament the accent falls on harmonious relationships and the restoration of a right relationship, first with God, and then with others.

Hesselink, I John. “John 14:23-29.” *Interpretation* 43, no. 2 (April 1989): 174–77.

This is no ordinary peace that Jesus offers: “Peace I leave with you. **My** peace I give **you**. Notice in the second statement, Jesus adds the possessive “my.” It has been claimed and possessed by Christ. It is the peace of God and is available to God’s children.

The disciples will need it as they will not experience the more superficial peace. They will encounter an abundance of conflict, both among themselves and in the world. Of course, so did Jesus. His life was full of conflict with those who were threatened by what he offered.

We scarcely need reminding that not everyone aspires to a life of peace. Some people feed off conflict as if it were air or water – essential to life. At the extreme, we observe this in Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, it manifests in more everyday, insidious ways such as the person who eschews gratitude for constant complaint or the person who refuses to address their concerns directly with others involved in favor of gossiping or plotting behind their backs. Others succumb to the pitfall of comparison and make room for internal conflict. Hyper partisanship in politics is another example of embracing discord over pursuing peace.

Ministry can be lonely even when surrounded by people. Jesus experienced that and escaped the crush of the crowd for the companionship of his Heavenly Parent. Following the Ascension, Jesus will be restored to full and unrestrained companionship with the Triune God. He has to look forward to that, when his loneliness will be abated. Jesus also empathizes with his human companions who he knows will miss him in the same way. That empathy leads to action and the other gift that Jesus will bless the disciples with upon his departure: the Holy Spirit. This is the gift Jesus bequeaths to his children.

That’s what God’s love looks like.

Do we want peace? If so, how do we find it?

Maybe God's peace finds us in the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is first of all Companion. Just as Jesus first called the disciples with the simple invitation to follow, the Holy Spirit offers us the presence of God among us. Our journey was never intended to be a lonely one. We were created for companionship, with God and one another. The Holy One does not leave us even when we feel abandoned. As the Apostle Paul will later talk about considering loss as gain, here we witness that in action. The loss of the physical presence of Jesus means that he will intercede for us in the heavenly Realm, and the Holy Spirit will accompany us in the earthly one. God doesn't subtract; the Creator multiplies.

And Jesus trusts that the love the disciples have for him will transcend his physical absence. He expects their love to rejoice for his blessing. He anticipates their love will lead them to raise the mantle he bequeaths them. Christ doesn't leave them an army outfitted with military tools and weapons of war. That's not the mark of his kingdom (God's family). He leaves them companionship and peace. He leaves them not with just a reminder of his love. After all, he will vividly demonstrate that. Jesus leaves them with a reminder that their love of him should manifest in certain ways. Their love of him demands something of them – that they love one another as Jesus has loved them. This relationship is mutual if unequal. Jesus has prepared an inheritance for them to receive, but he has also prepared them to be a people who can give, who can lead, and who can live in peace. Do we want peace? Then look for that which is of God in others. Walk in their shoes. Instead of criticizing others, find the good in them. And let them find the good in you. Love God. That's how God's Spirit dwells among us. That's how to find peace.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Grace & Peace,

Pastor Greg Rupright