



FIRST LESSON
ACTS 16:9-15

PSALM
PSALM 67

SECOND LESSON
REVELATION 21:10-22, 25

GOSPEL LESSON
ST. JOHN 14:23-29

PRAYER OF THE DAY

BOUNTIFUL GOD, YOU GATHER
YOUR PEOPLE INTO YOUR REALM,
AND YOU PROMISE US FOOD
FROM YOUR TREE OF LIFE.
NOURISH US WITH YOUR WORD,
THAT EMPOWERED BY YOUR SPIRIT
WE MAY LOVE ONE ANOTHER
AND THE WORLD YOU HAVE
MADE, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST,
OUR SAVIOR AND OUR LORD,
WHO LIVES AND REIGNS WITH
YOU AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, ON E
GOD, NOW AND FOREVER.
AMEN.

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Living in God's amazing grace

Liturgical Day: The Sixth Sunday in Easter

Date: May 13, 2007

Sermon Title: The Peace of the Lord

Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed! Christ is risen. Christi is risen indeed. Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed.

Sing this one with me, if you will:

*May the peace of the Lord be with you;
With your friends and your family too.
Let it be, let it grow, and everywhere you go,
May the peace of the Lord follow you.ⁱ*

Shalom Chavarim. That is the traditional blessing of God's people. *Shalom Chavarim*; in the Hebrew language that means, "Peace, my friend." As Hebrews, ancient and modern, meet one another on the streets of their city, they would call out to one another: *Shalom chavarim. Shalom to you.*

That greeting of peace is a part of our tradition as well. It is the core message of the song we sing to close Sunday evening Catechism Workshops – the song you just sang with me a moment ago, based on the words of this morning's text. It is the core message of the greeting that usually begins my sermons (at least when it's not the Easter season). Say it with me: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." We share a greeting of God's peace each week after the prayers, as we begin to celebrate the Eucharist. It is also the core message of the last words we share during worship on a given Sunday morning: "May the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace." and "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." Sing with me again, if you know the words:

*Don't be afraid. Let your hearts not be troubled
Have faith in God, and have faith in me.
May the peace of the Lord be with you;
With your friends and your family too.
Let it be, let it grow, and everywhere you go,
May the peace of the Lord follow you.*

Shalom — peace — it is a gift from God that has been celebrated by faithful people for many, many years. Yet though we often speak of it, peace is an elusive concept. It used to be that if the Soviet Union and the United States kept one another at bay through their military strength, we thought we were at peace. Consequently, we and they developed a strong military presence in our lands and throughout the world. We arm-wrestled over smaller, less influential countries. But we never directly confronted one another. We described it as a sort of a peace.

These days it seems more difficult to be confident that we are at peace. Attacks on our own soil have unsettled our sense of security. There are situations that seem quite volatile just across our borders: in places as near by as Mexico or Central America, or Haiti. And far away, peace seems even more removed: proof of that is found in Rwanda, Somalia and the Middle East... the list goes on and on.

The skeptic wonders if the absence of an east-west conflict has changed anything at all — or if the vacuum created by the end of that conflict is now being filled by smaller and more numerous conflicts. However we analyze it, it is clear that the peace our world has achieved is a fragile peace, and one that is easily shattered.

ⁱ The peace of the Lord, Gary Ault, © 1987, by GIA Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission from GIA Publications, Inc. License no. 6561.

Let's sing again:

*Peace now I give you. It's my peace I give to you.
Not as the world gives do I give to you.
May the peace of the Lord be with you;
With your friends and your family too.
Let it be, let it grow, and everywhere you go,
May the peace of the Lord follow you*

Our Gospel speaks of peace this morning, but as the song reminds us, it is a different peace than the peace that this world has achieved. St. John has Jesus seated at the table with his followers during the night he was betrayed. He washes his followers feet, as a sign to them of the love they were to have for one another. He challenges them to live lives of sacrificial love — living for others as he has lived for them. Then he says something strange and mysterious. Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives... Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." What is this peace that Jesus offers his disciples?

As I was trying to understand the answer to that question, I spent some time thinking about the Hebrew word for peace: Shalom. It's an interesting word, Shalom. It has not so much to do with the cessation of war and conflict, although they are certainly a part of Shalom. But it has more to do with being well: physical well being; material well being; emotional well being; spiritual well being.

When the first century believer said, Shalom Chavarim ("Peace, my friend") it meant something far deeper than, "I hope nothing goes wrong to disturb you today." It was a more significant blessing than the "Have a nice day!" that people of our day seem to toss at one another. Instead, for the First Century speaker, it meant:

- I hope you are healthy and well fed.
- I hope you are clothed warmly and housed comfortably.
- I hope your spirits are strong.
- I hope you are right with God.

That is the kind of peace that the word Shalom refers to. That is the kind of peace that Jesus sought to leave with his followers. And that is the kind of peace that he wishes for us to experience today.

Let's sing again:

*May the peace of the Lord be with you;
With your friends and your family too.
Let it be, let it grow, and everywhere you go,
May the peace of the Lord follow you*

This seems like a good day, to me, for us to consider this gift of God's peace. And not only God's peace, but how is it that you and I become agents of peace in our world. You see the interesting thing about Shalom – God's peace – is that at its most significant level, Shalom doesn't have to do with nations or counties, or cities, or even neighborhoods. At its most significant level, Shalom has to do with the lives of single individuals like you and me.

Today is the 100th anniversary of Mothers' Day in this country, I'm told. It is a day when we consider what it means to be called by God to serve as a mother. There are many things that mothers are called on to do, and any one of those tasks can seem a dull and mundane task if it is considered on it's own merits. But to serve as a mother (or, for that matter to serve as a father) is nothing less than a sacred task. It is nothing less than contributing to world peace, because the truth is: peace begins at home. It begins right here: in my heart. It begins with me realizing that I am who God created me to be. It begins with me experiencing the physical and emotional and spiritual wellness that the Hebrew word Shalom describes. World peace begins with me beginning to live peaceably with my family and my neighbors. And then it spreads

It spreads as I treat a family member with dignity and love. It spreads when I share a kind word with a grocery clerk or someone at the dry cleaning counter. It spreads when I stoop down to talk with a child, or take time to visit with one who is older. That's a peace — a Shalom — that all the military might in the world cannot touch. Because it resides right here, in the center of my being; where my Savior dwells — assuring me of my place with God — and strengthening me to be a peacemaker in daily life. As parents, we are called by God to create an environment of shalom for our children. We are called to help them grow up with an experience of peace, so that they become committed to being instruments of peace in the world.

Today we consider together the peace that is offered to us by Jesus Christ. A peace that is offered to me, and a peace that is offered to you. A peace that begins in the heart of an individual believer. And from there is spread to family and friends, to neighbors and acquaintances, to citizens of city, state, and nation — even to the ends of the earth. A peace that comes within — and cannot be threatened by any of the powers that be.

That is how God has chosen to act, you know. Through simple, fragile, imperfect, unreliable human beings. Human beings whose very actions have the power to lend Shalom to another's life. May God see fit to use you and me, that this kind of peace might fill the earth. Let's sing it one more time.

*May the peace of the Lord be with you;
With your friends and your family too.
Let it be, let it grow, and everywhere you go,
May the peace of the Lord follow you*

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (May 13, 2007)

English Text: ⁱⁱ

[²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?"] ²³ Jesus answered him, "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. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

²⁵ "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe. ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church_year/lectionary.html.

ⁱⁱⁱ St. John 14:23-29, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

Greek Text:

[²²λέγει αὐτῷ Ἰούδας, οὐχ ὁ Ἰσκαριώτης· κύριε, (καὶ] τί γέγονεν ὅτι ἡμῖν μέλλεις ἐμφανίζειν σεαυτὸν καὶ οὐχὶ τῷ κόσμῳ;] ²³ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ἐάν τις ἀγαπᾷ με τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσει, καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ἀγαπήσει αὐτὸν καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐλευσόμεθα καὶ μονὴν παρ' αὐτῷ ποιησόμεθα. ²⁴ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν με τοὺς λόγους μου οὐ τηρεῖ· καὶ ὁ λόγος ὃν ἀκούετε οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμὸς ἀλλὰ τοῦ πέμψαντος με πατρός.

²⁵Ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν παρ' ὑμῖν μένων· ²⁶ὁ δὲ παράκλητος, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ὃ πέμπει ὁ πατήρ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι μου, ἐκεῖνος ὑμᾶς διδάξει πάντα καὶ ὑπομνήσει ὑμᾶς πάντα ἃ εἶπον ὑμῖν [ἐγώ]. ²⁷Εἰρήνην ἀφίημι ὑμῖν, εἰρήνην τὴν ἐμὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν· οὐ καθὼς ὁ κόσμος δίδωσιν ἐγὼ δίδωμι ὑμῖν. μὴ ταρασσέσθω ὑμῶν ἡ καρδία μηδὲ δειλιάτω. ²⁸ἤκούσατε ὅτι ἐγὼ εἶπον ὑμῖν· ὑπάγω καὶ ἔρχομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς. εἰ ἠγαπάτε με ἐχάρητε ἂν ὅτι πορεύομαι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, ὅτι ὁ πατήρ μείζων μου ἔστιν. ²⁹καὶ νῦν εἰρηκα ὑμῖν πρὶν γενέσθαι, ἵνα ὅταν γένηται πιστεύσητε. ^{iv}

^{iv} St. John 14:23-29, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).