

10th May 2020, Fifth Sunday of Easter: John 14:1-6,27 – Jesus Our Way and Peace

75 years ago this weekend, peace was declared in Europe. The Second World War had cost millions of lives and involved a huge number of nations, many of whom took years or even decades to recover. The war itself was also to continue for another 4 months in Asia.

Nonetheless, for all that, the declaration of peace prompted great celebrations in Britain and elsewhere. Whilst there was still so much loss to grieve, and so much left to do in the future, Winston Churchill was quite rightly able to say to the nation: ‘We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing.’ Many of us had such a brief period yesterday too.

Receiving peace is one of the foundational themes of the New Testament. St Paul introduced all of his letters with the greeting: ‘Grace and Peace’. Grace is what enables us to know salvation and the *zoe* life of God within us; peace is the first and greatest outcome of this new life.

Peace is the hallmark of every dimension of our relationships. Peace with God, peace with others, peace with ourselves. We are called to peace. As we saw in yesterday’s Daily Inspiration, in Colossians 3:15, Paul writes: ‘Let the *peace* of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.’ Peace is not merely the absence of strife; it is the presence of harmony.

And peace is not merely a concept, such as not harming someone. The songwriter John Lennon famously wrote: ‘all we are saying is: give peace a chance.’ This has always failed because the notion of peace itself is simply an idea. Notice what Paul wrote: ‘Let the peace *of Christ* rule...’ The idea of peace is not what solves conflict; it is the *peace of Jesus* that provides the power to live and work in harmony.

So what is the peace of Jesus? It is “the peace that belongs to his kingdom by virtue of his sovereignty.” Jesus rules and reigns over everything: all creation, all humanity and all history. When we step into his reign (in other words, when we step into the kingdom of God), we step into his peace. We can now live in constant interaction with Jesus, and because of his protection, guidance and provision, we have nothing to fear; we can live with real confidence. In the kingdom of God we are safe, secure, valued and assured that God is with us.

And this assurance enables us to receive the peace of Christ, a peace that, as Jesus says the world cannot give; or as St Paul puts it elsewhere, **a peace that surpasses all understanding.**

It’s why Jesus is so emphatic when it comes to issues of worry, fear or anxiety. Have you noticed that Jesus never talks about these things in terms of advice or encouragement, but instead as a command? He doesn’t say: *try not to* worry, *try not to* fear, *try not to* be troubled... He commands it: ‘Do not worry, do not fear, do not be troubled.’

Of course we all face temptations to worry and fear, to un-peace as you might say. And Jesus knows that. But he also knows that the solution is not human effort or technique. **The key to peace is found in him, and through him. He is the Way.** Our peace is found in a person, one who has all the power and resources of the universe at his disposal. His perfect love casts out our fear.

And so he says to his disciples: Do not be troubled, because I am the way. All other worldviews, all other religious teachers say: this is the way. Only Jesus says: 'I am the way.' The key to life is not a set of moral values or guidelines or principles, it's a relationship. 'It's a deep union of love with me.

'And when you know that, you'll know the right way to live, because I am the Truth. And you'll have abundant life, because I am the Life.'

We often use this passage at funerals, because it points to the reality of life beyond death. It is the source of our Christian hope. But, as I always emphasise whenever we read it, the reason I love this passage is because it is the *opposite* of escapism. It doesn't hide from the reality of life: rather it speaks into it – it faces it head on, and out the other side. When Jesus speaks these words, he is himself about to die. This is not theory, it is lived experience.

And so we can affirm these great words again today, and claim the peace that Jesus promises his followers. We, too, in this extraordinary season, are surrounded by the shadow of death. We too have remembered this weekend the great sacrifices of 75 years ago. And yet, we can also affirm, with hope and even joy, that **peace is possible, a real peace, a peace that only Jesus can give, because he is the Way, the Truth and the Life.** Amen.