

May 22nd, 2022 • Sixth Sunday of Easter • Baptism • In-Person and Online Worship

“Alleluia Is Our Song! – A Different Kind of Peace”

Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris



John 14:23-27

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. 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. I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 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. 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.”

We are nearing the end of this joyful season of Eastertide, as it is called in the church. 50 days, from the Resurrection of Christ on Easter on to the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Eastertide is the season in which we experience the presence of our Risen Lord, ponder again his teachings for us, and, as did the early church, live into this faith and put it into our own words as we find our place in the unfolding, never-ending story of God’s great love for us and all humankind.

What a joy to celebrate together this morning the baptism of baby Luka. As a community, we welcome him into the faith we share, a faith that will give him strength and grounding and peace his whole life long and into the next. Peace, we hear Jesus saying to his first disciples and to all of us. “My peace I give to you.” Peace given to baby Luka and peace given to each and all of us.

Some may recall that the Eastertide season began a few weeks ago with the story of Jesus from John’s Gospel. On that day, we heard the story of how, on the evening of that first Easter, the disciples gathered in a house and locked the doors from fear, locking themselves into a tomb of their own.

The Risen Lord is there among them, saying exactly what they need to hear: “Peace be with you.” And again he says: “Peace be with you.”

Their hearts and their minds begin to remember all that he had said to them. Their Risen Savior stands among them offering peace, evoking great joy, and appointing them as witnesses to the world.

This morning we return to some of the last words he had spoken to them from what is called his “Farewell Discourse,” his farewell speech to his disciples on the last night he was with them all before his death when they had gathered with him around the table where he shared with them the bread and cup as ways to remember him.

The disciples were, no doubt, as anxious and afraid that night before his death as they were on that first Easter night when he had been resurrected. Disoriented, already grieving. Jesus knows. He loves them dearly. He is their Good Shepherd. And so, in the midst of it all, to comfort them, to heal them, to assure them, he gives them again this incredible gift: peace. “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.”

How many times I have proclaimed these words at a funeral or memorial service! Looking into the eyes of grieving family and friends, I remind them of his words to us, his gift: “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.”

When these words are spoken at a Memorial Service, they bring comfort to those who mourn. How do we hear them outside that context? What do they mean as we face into life rather than death? How do we hear them on the day of a

baptism? How does a follower of Jesus stay grounded in the peace that gives us courage to live into the needs of the world—eyes wide open, hearts full of love, vision set on justice, healing and hope?

What is this peace? And why did Jesus say: “not as the world gives...”? Jesus wanted to clearly distinguish between God’s peace and what passed for peace in the world as they knew it. In the midst of the Roman Empire, peace meant merely the absence of war. It was the “Pax Romana,” imposed and enforced by the sword. It was oppressive and coercive. It kept things quiet, which meant keeping the Jewish people and other conquered people in their place.

That’s not at all what I mean, Jesus was trying to say. My peace is not as the world gives. The peace I give to you, that I bequeath to you, is God’s peace, shalom. Shalom was familiar to Jesus and to his first disciples, a word found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

Shalom, the peace of God, cannot be defined narrowly as the absence of war. Shalom is the fullness of life, for all. Shalom pertains to the individual, the community, and the web of relationships in which each person lives. It is the condition of wholeness, of complete welfare that encompasses the whole person. It is the “peace on earth” which the angels proclaimed at Jesus’ birth. God’s shalom is a state of wholeness and security, universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight, for us and for all creation.

This is the peace with which Christ blesses us. This is the peace Jesus gives to us and he gives it to us that we might give it away. Jesus points his disciples out to the waiting world. “Just as God sent me,” he says, “so also I send you.”

Jesus sends us out carrying God’s peace to the whole world. Jesus sends us to embody and proclaim his peace when the worship service has ended, and to use it to bless all those we meet and indeed, to bless the whole creation with peace. Take it with you, this peace—take it, and give it away.

Wow. That’s a pretty big challenge for all of us, isn’t it, especially in these troubled times in which we live. It’s a big challenge for baby Luka who is just about to reach his first birthday in a few weeks!

But especially in a time such as this, the peace of Christ is just what we need, and just what we have. It is our foundation and cornerstone.

And always remember—we don’t walk this path alone. We share in Luka’s baptism this day. Today we each pledge again to live as Christ’s disciples. And together we have an amazing company of faith and support that is the church, the Body of Christ in the world.

Not only that—Jesus assures us that God sends the Holy Spirit to walk with us, to refresh us, to continually remind us of God’s vision and God’s purpose for our lives and for the world, and to teach us everything. Teach us everything...that’s the journey of a lifetime, as we continue to learn and grow and serve.

The resurrected Christ, the Prince of Peace, gives us the resources and riches we need—to stay steady, to stand tall, to give back, and to share with others this precious gift of peace, that sustains us and restores to life each of us, all of us, and indeed, to the church, and to the world, and to the whole creation.

Dear friends, from this day forward, receive the gift of peace and continue to live into the peace of Christ. Make it the story of your life in your own words. And through it all, keep a song of Alleluia on your lips and in your hearts.

Thanks be to God! AMEN