

May 22, 2022  
John 14:23-29

Easter 6  
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

## **“The Bequest of 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.”*

One of the classic episodes of *The Honeymooners* involved a woman who was a regular passenger on Ralph Kramden’s bus. When the woman died, Ralph is informed that she was very wealthy, and because of his kindness to her she has named him in her will. Since Ralph always had dreams of getting rich and escaping the tenement apartment that he shared with his wife Alice, he begins to plan for a life as a millionaire along with his best friend Ed Norton. When the day comes when the will is read in her lawyer’s office, Ralph is informed that he is the heir to her “fortune.” Ralph’s celebration takes a surprising turn, as he discovers that “Fortune” does not involve millions of dollars, because “Fortune” is the name of her pet bird. Ralph’s inheritance is not what he had expected.

Wills and estate planning are important for families as people plan for their later years and how their earthly possessions will be shared after their death. This planning involves planning for health care proxies, persons who will have power of attorney, and living wills stated one’s end-of-life wishes. It also includes the disposition of one’s estate after death, who will be the executor, and how these possessions will be divided. Many of us have been the beneficiaries of bequests that have allowed us to continue to share the legacy of those who have gone before us, as we seek to also provide for our heirs after our days in this world come to an end.

The language that Jesus uses to speak with his disciples in today’s Gospel lesson speaks of the bequests he is bestowing on his disciples as he faces the hour of his death. This is a part of the Farewell Discourse in John’s Gospel, where Jesus is both consoling and instructing his disciples as he is about to be arrested and die on the Cross at Golgotha. It begins with Jesus’ response to one of his disciples after his statement that *“they who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”* (14:21). In response, *“Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?’*” (14:21). Jesus answers his disciple by referring back to his earlier promise that *“in my Father’s house there are many dwelling places ... and if I go and prepare a place for*

*you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also*” (14:2-3). When the disciples live in love and thereby keep Jesus’ word, they will experience the love of God, and it is through that love that they will also experience the indwelling of God and Jesus: *“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.”* (14:23). To love Jesus is to live with God and Jesus, to enter into relationship with them, to be home in the abiding presence of the Lord (*“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.”* – 15:10). The revelation of God in Jesus is explicitly linked to the community’s love of Jesus and God’s love for them: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him shall not perish but shall have eternal life.”* (3:16). The abiding presence of God and Jesus with the community is thus both the foundation and the result of the community’s love.

- “When Jesus’ disciples follow his own model of love, then, it is possible for relationship with Jesus to extend beyond the first generation of believers. Relationship with Jesus does not depend on physical presence, but on the presence of the love of God in the life of the community. And the love for God is present whenever those who love Jesus keep his commandments, when they continue to live out the love that Jesus showed them in his own life and death.”  
– Gail O’Day.

Jesus continues his words of consolation and instruction to his disciples with the phrase *“I have said these things to you”* (14:25), which occurs repeatedly in the Farewell Discourse as a transitional sentence both to draw together earlier teachings and to introduce a new teaching (*“I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling.”* – 16:1). As Jesus has shared his instructions *“while I am still with you,”* he again promises that *“the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and will remind you of all that I have said to you.”* (14:26). Ezekiel had foretold a time when God would dwell with the redeemed people in the new covenant community (*“My dwelling-place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”* – Ezekiel 37:27), and Jesus had promised earlier in the Farewell Discourse that *“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.”* (14:16). This promise of divine indwelling is fulfilled in the gift of the Holy Spirit by which God dwells with Jesus’ disciples; *“God’s dwelling in Jesus’ disciples after the resurrection is a genuine present sharing in heavenly life that is the Father’s house.”* (Francis Martin and William M. Wright IV). Jesus emphasizes the continuity between what Jesus teaches

while he is present and what the Paraclete will teach when he is absent. The phrase “to remind” (*hypomimnesko*) occurs only here in John, but a related word “to remember” (*mimneskomai*) occurs in other parts of the Fourth Gospel:

- “After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.” – 2:22.
- “His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.” – 12:16.

The Advocate (*Paraclete*) does not teach new things but keeps Jesus’ own teachings alive in the post-resurrection community. It is through the presence of the Holy Spirit that Jesus will continue to be present with his disciples; “*Jesus moves his disciples beyond the present moment in which they are living into a future that is grounded in the certitude of the resurrection and the gift of the Spirit.*” (O’Day).

Jesus’ words of assurance to his disciples now contain a new promise: the gift of Jesus’ 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.*” (14:27). In the Old Testament, “peace” (*shalom*) was a conventional word used in leave-taking (“*Then Eli said, ‘Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.’*” – 1 Samuel 1:17), but Jesus is not simply saying farewell to his disciples with this type of peace. Jesus makes it explicitly clear that it is *my* peace (*Eirene*) that he is sharing with them, and that this peace is not the same as the world gives peace. His gift of peace is the gift of *shalom* that only God can give, a peace that signifies more than the absence of conflict; “*it is a profound sense of well-being; it is the kind of peace which the world cannot give, but can only come from God*” (Elizabeth Johnson). In the context of Jesus’ death, “to leave” (*aphiemi*) takes on the meaning of a bequest; peace is the inheritance that Jesus bestows on those who are heirs of God’s promises through their baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ. Jesus has earlier promised that “*I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you*” (14:18), because they will abide in the peace of Jesus (“*I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace.*” – 16:33). The peace that Jesus offers is not the world’s peace – neither the false promise of security (“*They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.*” – Jeremiah 6:14), nor the end of conflict. The peace that Jesus gives is *his* peace, a peace that derives from the heart of Jesus’ life. The peace of Jesus is “*the*

*all-embracing sphere of his life, his love, [and] his joy.*” (O’Day). The gift of peace that rests at the centre of Israel’s eschatological hopes is now available in Jesus:

- “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’” – Isaiah 52:7.
- “For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion for you.” – Isaiah 54:10.
- “He shall cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem; and battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” – Zechariah 9:10.

The promise of Jesus’ peace is not an occasion for complacency; “*do not let them be afraid (deiliato)*” calls the disciples to find strength to face the new circumstances in which Jesus’ departure places them. Jesus calls his disciples to a confident, trusting faith and promises them the peace that comes from obeying the Father and knowing God’s love. It is the peace of God that drives out fear: “*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection with God.*” (1 John 4:18).

- “It is a very comforting and pleasing word that he leaves them. It does not consist of cities and castles or of silver and gold; it is peace, the greatest treasure in heaven and on earth. He does not want his disciples to be fearful and mournful; he wants them to have true, beautiful, and long-for peace of heart.” – Martin Luther.

As Jesus has earlier encouraged his disciples to “*not let your hearts be troubled*” (14:1), he again addresses the reality of his departure and what that will mean to the disciples he will leave behind. Jesus asks his followers to look at their understanding of the nature and meaning of love in their relationship with Jesus: “*If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.*” (14:28). Do the disciples love only for their own benefit, or do they love for Jesus’ benefit as well? If they can be generous with their love, then they will rejoice. This reminds them also of Jesus’ earlier promise that speaks to the necessity of his departure:

- “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.” – 14:2-3.

When Jesus states that “*the Father is greater than I,*” he is referring to God as the one who sent Jesus, the incarnate Word, into the world to do God’s work (“*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.*” – 1:14). As the one sent by God, Jesus cannot be greater than the one who sent him (“*Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their masters, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.*” – 13:16). All of Jesus’ life and ministry is to make God known; for “*no one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.*” (1:18). Jesus’ reminder of the Father’s greatness is a reminder that Jesus’ life is all about God, not about himself; “*It is a cause for rejoicing when Jesus returns to the Father, because his revelation of the character of God his completed.*” (O’Day). Jesus wants his disciples to recognize that the events of the hour belong to his revelation of God and so are an occasion for faith: “*And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.*” (14:29).

- “The Spirit assures us that we are never abandoned, even in the midst of the loss, pain, and sorrow that are part of life in this broken world. The Word who became flesh and lived among us continues to make his home with us, even as he prepares our eternal dwelling with God.” – Johnson.

An important aspect of estate planning is providing for our loved ones after our death, especially if we die suddenly or prematurely. Jesus’ words assure his disciples that the bequest of peace he bestows on them will provide them with the strength, hope, and love that will sustain and guide them throughout their lives after his departure. This is the inheritance that our Lord bestows on all who have been reborn as children in Holy Baptism, in which we are “*given a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*” (1 Peter 1:3). The apostle’s letter was written to a community that had been disinherited; they had lost their homes, their family connections, their occupations, and all that had given them their identity because of their confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. The letter is written to encourage them and to remind them that while they may have suffered loss, what they have gained is of far greater value; for in baptism, they have been” built *into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through*

*Jesus Christ.*” (2:5). In their baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, they have received an identity that no one can take away from them:

- “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” – 2:9-10.

As God’s beloved children, we have been born anew “*into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you*” (1:4). We have the blessed assurance that all of God’s blessings will be always ours, offering “*strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,*” assuring us that because we are God’s children that we will abide in the “*peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” (Philippians 4:7). We are heirs of an inheritance that offers the greatest security, peace, love, and confidence, for it is an inheritance that is bequeathed to us by the God who so loves us that he gave his only Son so that we might know that now and always we are children of God:

- “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.” – 1 John 3:1-3.

One of the greatest joys and privileges of my service as an ordained minister is presiding at services of Holy Baptism. I gather with parents, godparents, family and friends for a celebration of the new child with whom they have been blessed, as we baptize them a child of God and a member of the Body of Christ. These loving parents will do everything possible to provide for their children so that they may live happy and healthy lives and enjoy the abundance of God’s blessings; in bringing their children to the waters of baptism, they are assuring these new sisters and brothers in Christ that they will be heirs of the peace of Christ that will comfort and assure them, the presence of the Holy Spirit that abides with us always, and the bequest of God’s blessed love that will abide with us through the days of our lives and unto everlasting life. As we are heirs to our family legacies, we are also heirs of the legacy that God

bequeaths upon God's beloved children, the perfect love of God that casts out all fear and gives us strength to meet each day in the comfort of a holy and certain hope.

- “While we live on earth we must live in hope. For although we know that through faith we possess all the riches of God (for faith certainly brings with it the new birth and inheritance), we do not yet see them. Therefore, they still stand in hope, and are laid aside a little while, so that we cannot see them with our eyes. This he calls the hope of life.” – Luther, 1523.

The “Fortune” that Ralph Kramden inherited was not what he had anticipated or desired; but the inheritance that is ours as children of God and heirs of God's promises far exceeds anything we could hope for or desire. It is the blessed hope that offers us the peace that will sustain and strengthen us in this life as it assures us that one day our Lord who has claimed us as God's children will lead us to our eternal home. May the bequest of God's blessed peace give us and all God's children the confidence to live each day faithfully and fearlessly, for we have the blessed assurance that we are God's children, an identity and inheritance that can never be taken from us; for *“we have God's own promise, and that cannot fail!”*

Amen.