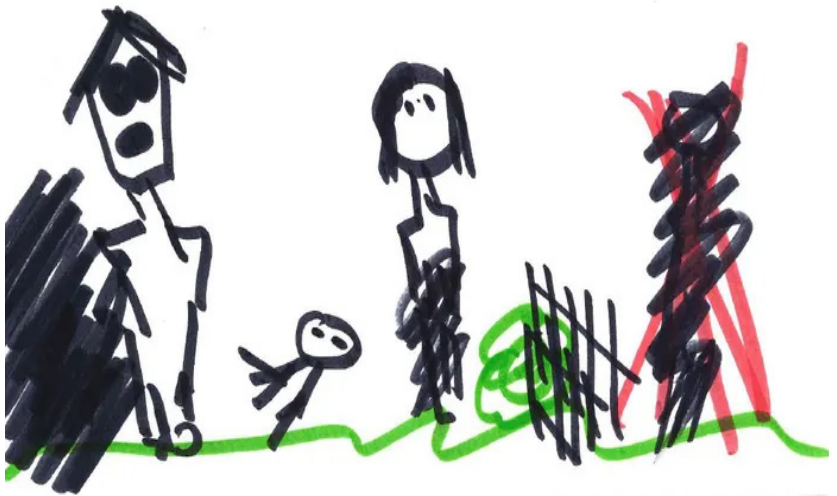


May 22, 2022

Sixth Sunday of Easter

The Rev. Garrett Yates
St. Anne's in-the-Fields Episcopal Church

John 13:23-29



In his farewell discourse, Jesus contrasts two kinds of peace: a peace that he leaves us and a peace that the world gives us. What is the difference?

The peace that the world can give to us is not a negative or a bad peace. It is real and it is good, but it is fragile and inadequate.

The peace that the world gives is fragile because it can easily be taken away from us. Peace, as we experience it ordinarily in our lives, is generally predicated on feeling healthy, loved, and secure. But all of these are fragile. They can change radically with one visit to the doctor, with an unexpected dizzy spell, with sudden chest pains, with the loss of a job, with the rupture of a relationship, or with multiple kinds of betrayal that can blindsides us. We try mightily to take measures to guarantee health, security, and the trustworthiness of our relationships, but we live with a lot of anxiety, knowing these are always fragile. We live inside an anxious peace. A peace threatened by impermanence.

This kind of peace we experience in our ordinary lives never comes to us without a shadow. As Henri Nouwen puts it, there is a quality of sadness that pervades all the moments of our life so that even in our most happy moments there is something missing. I remember being in an apple orchard with a dear friend and I was up on the ladder plucking fruit for the winter, tossing them down into a moving basket, and the pale light of the sun poured through cloud and leaf and branch, and I longed for something beyond time and space, and yet, I found apples rotted, rotten, dying, and there was sadness.

In every satisfaction there is an awareness of limitation. In every success there is fear of jealousy. In every friendship there is distance. In every embrace there is loneliness. In this life there is not such a thing as a clear-cut, pure joy. Every bit of life is touched by a bit of death. The world can give us peace, except it never does this perfectly.

What Jesus offers is a peace that is not fragile, that is already beyond fear and anxiety, that does not depend upon feeling healthy, secure, and loved in this world. What is this peace?

In her novel *Gilead*, Marilynne Robinson describes an old Protestant pastor, John Ames, nearing death, and who writes down for his seven-year-old son all the things that he will never be able to share with him when he is older. He writes that we are commanded to honor our parents but no parent should need to be commanded to honor their children. This is the deepest impulse of parenthood. It is a delight in our existence, like that of God. The old preacher takes pleasure in the particularity of his son:

There's a shimmer on a child's hair, in the sunlight. There are rainbow colors in it, tiny, soft beams of just the same colors you can see on the dew sometimes. They're in the petal of flowers and they're on a child's skin. Your hair is straight and dark and your skin is very fair. I suppose you're not much prettier than most children. You're just a nice looking boy, a bit slight, well scrubbed and well mannered. All that is fine, but it's your existence I love you for, mainly.

I don't love you because of a particular thing. I don't love you for any other reason other than that you are. I wonder if this kind of love would birth peace in the soul.

The point here is that God's love for us isn't something we can add on to our experience. God's love is the reason for our being at all. God doesn't consider our positive attributes and weigh them against our negative, and then, based on the scales, decide to love us. God is glad that we are.

An analogy from this comes from my childhood. I am a few years older than my little sister, and she came home from nursery school with a drawing of our family. Now I was only 8 or 9, and really no art critic, but there was very little I could recognize, not least myself. I was a dot, my mom was a hideous purple and black blob. And I remember seeing how happy my mom was to look at the picture. *What in the world, Mother? This is an offense to all taste and decency!* Thinking back on it now, I wonder if our relationship to God is like this; we bring our day to God, what we've made of it – God isn't an art critic, God is a delighted parent so glad that we are, that we trust God enough to bring whatever we've made, and receive God's delight. Not in what we've made; what we've done; but that we are.

Here's what I'm trying to say – peace isn't something we can create for ourselves. We can't go to the store and buy it; we can't take a class and learn it; we can't read our way into it; it's truly a peace that the world cannot give.

The sermon was mostly written last night, but ya know, something didn't feel quite right about focusing about my own sense of peace when so much of the world seems a million miles away from feeling the peace Jesus gives. Peace – not in Buffalo, not for the victims of the racist hate crime, not for the families of Roberta, Margus, Andre, Aaron, Geraldine, Celestine, Heyward, Katherine, Massey, Pear, Ruth Zaire, Jennifer, and Christopher; peace - not for the Taiwanese community in California; Peace – not for the families, not for the mothers and the fathers, brothers and sisters and friends of those who have lost loved ones to gun violence and who have to relive the trauma every time mass shootings happen.

A peace that only delights in us runs the risk of being a cheap peace.

Cheap peace doesn't ask us to change. Cheap peace is about staying the same, while trying to feel better about it. Cheap peace has nothing to do with Jesus. The one who promises a peace that the world cannot give, is the same one who said, I came not to bring peace, but a sword. Jesus gives a peace that the world cannot give; but that's not to say that his peace has nothing to do with the world. It has everything to do with our world. The one who came to bring a sword is the Living Lord who intends to disarm his followers of all their false senses of peace. To follow Jesus, to know his peace, is to be a disarmed human being. His peace disarms us, and calls into question all the ways we arm ourselves to secure our own unjust versions of cheap peace. Let me be very clear and make what should be a remarkably obvious statement: this nation has a gun problem, an addiction to guns – firearms are in some sense the golden calf of our culture, the very symbol of our own efforts to make ourselves safe and at peace. Unsure of the one who gives us the peace the world cannot give, we secure whatever fragile and anxious peace we can. And it is not okay for people who claim to have received the disarming peace of Jesus to continue to defend the instrument of anti-peace.

It's a risky thing to be delighted in. We have huge defenses against this unconditional love. It renders us vulnerable. And it asks something of us. It asks us to think about what kind of peace we are looking for. It asks us to not just receive the love of God, but to act on it. To invite the world to be disarmed by it.

Peace begins with the God who delights in the fact that we are. God's love delighting in us is the reason any of us are. This is a love and a delight that death cannot undo. This is a love and a delight that our sins can't undo. This is a love and a delight that no sickness, no suffering, no heartache can undo. And...this is a love that the more and more it gets into us, the more it infects us, the more we are able to know a peace that the world cannot ever take away. When we know this peace, we are able to stand up against the false peace, the cheap peace of xenophobia, racism, and fear that uses violence to enforce.

But to know the delight of God in the sheer givenness of another's life, is to stand up to and against anything that might harm that life. To receive Jesus' peace, to receive the delight of God will change our souls, and it will disarm our lives. Our world disarmed of prejudice, guns, and fear – we will live as one in the delight of God. The peace that the world cannot give is given us today, and it sends us back into the world to be risky followers, delighted in and disarmed by the love of God. It's a peace the world cannot give, but is crying out to be given.