

BACKGROUND: 1 MAY 2016

(Reading - John 14: 23-29)

On this morning I want to focus on verse 27: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

In Greek the word for peace is Irene. In Hebrew it is shalom. Shalom in the Old Testament meant wholeness, soundness, hence health, well-being, prosperity; more particularly, peace as opposed to war. The basic feature of the Greek concept of εἰρήνη is that the word does not primarily denote a relationship between several people, or an attitude, but a state, i.e., “time of peace” or “state of peace,” originally conceived of purely as an interlude in the everlasting state of war. Irene/peace can also signify a “peaceful attitude”.

In the New Testament the meaning of Irene/peace is much the same as shalom.. This may be seen first in its use in greetings and similar expressions, where it has the sense of well-being or salvation. It is also used in final greetings. Paul, too, constantly uses this word in his greetings and farewell salutations.

In the New Testament it occurs as:

1. Peace is a gift from God
2. Peace is the salvation of the whole man.
3. Peace with God.
4. Peace of men with one another.
5. Peace of soul.

Jewish teachers highly celebrated peace (especially in terms of relationships with others). But clearly in our reading it seems as if Jesus was talking of another concept of peace...

SERMON

What is peace?

Sometimes it is better to define something by what it is not.

Is peace the absence of hearing any noise?

Is peace the absence of violence and war?

Is peace the absence of any disagreements or different opinions?

Is peace in a context?

I read this story about a retired couple who were so concerned about the threat of nuclear war that they decided to carefully research the safest place on earth to which they could move and live. They studied and travelled, travelled and studied. Finally they found THE PLACE – a new home in the Falkland Islands in 1980. But then the inevitable, something I guess they never imagined, happened, when on Friday, the 2nd of April 1982 Argentina invaded the Falklands. It started a war between Argentina and Britain that lasted for 10 weeks and killed about 907 people.

All they wanted was a place on earth where they could live in peace, or as they thought a place where there is no war going on!

So what is peace then? What does Jesus mean? Where can we find it?

This morning our Bible reading gives us the answer. Peace is a gift from God through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus said that about peace that:

- He is leaving them peace, meaning that if they follow Him they will have His peace,
- His peace is totally different from the world's view of peace,
- His peace is present despite the brokenness that exists on earth.

What was Jesus saying? I mean He was just betrayed by someone who was very close to Him. He knew that His death was imminent. He knew He had to say goodbye to people who were close to Him, so close that they travelled and lived together. How is it possible that Jesus could speak of peace when there was really **no peace** at all in and around HIM?

I guess that was why Jesus explicitly said that HIS peace is totally different from the world's perspective of peace. This world cannot give believers PEACE, His peace is a gift that is only possible by believing and following HIM. His peace does not mean the absence of differences, war or disputes. His peace is present when and if His followers live their lives with the knowledge that in life and death, they belong to God, in and through Jesus Christ through the help of the Holy Spirit.

So Jesus' peace is outwith and beyond OUR control. His peace has nothing to do with the surroundings or with what is happening in our world today. His peace is what the apostle Paul said is a peace that surpasses all human understanding!

I often wonder if this is not our problem. We want to be in control of everything and sometimes we become so controlling. We want to control OUR world, OUR relationships, OUR children's lives, OUR husbands and wives. WE want to control everything if we have the slightest opportunity. And I think this is the problem why so many people never find the real **peace**, why so many people are experiencing anxiety, stress, depression so much. Yes we want rely on ourselves to sort out all the problems in and around us. We want to control and manage it ourselves. We want to be in control and once we find that we lost that control, when the problem is bigger than our ability to cope, we fall into depression and lose all hope of living.

We cannot control God. We cannot control other people. We cannot control our circumstances. We cannot control our future. Everything is in God's power and will happen as and whenever HE wills. He is the Almighty God and is in control of everything. And because He is in control, we need to trust HIM with all our problems. And if we do, we indeed have nothing to fear.

So we need to look to the One who is in control. We need to learn to LET GO and LET GOD BE. If we do this, we will have HIS peace all around us. We need to tell God about our troubles, our needs and our pain. If we totally rely on God, we will have his Peace.

And we can see this in the lives of Jesus' disciples. Despite opposition, they preached His gospel to all people. Despite their circumstances, they had peace, the peace that only God can give. And it is also true of the apostle Paul. Despite fierce opposition, imprisonment and suffering, he still managed to sing joyful praises to God.

Jesus' peace was not in the absence of difficulties, but in the PRESENCE of God. Jesus was completely at peace because

- He knew that God the Father was with Him

- He knew his Father was in control
- He knew his Father would take care of Him
- He knew his Father was always right
- He knew his Father could be trusted

I think our message this morning is so encouraging. Despite our difficulties, pain and suffering - we can still have that same peace Jesus experienced.

Despite our broken relationships – we can have the peace of God.

Why? Because we can trust God.

So let us put our trust in a Sovereign God who is in control. Let us ask God more to help us, instead of relying too much on ourselves or other people. Let us give God our burdens to carry. Let us stop controlling and being controlling.

If we do this, in and through faith alone, we will have the peace of God....
A peace that surpasses all human understanding!

Amen