

Sixth Sunday in Easter

May 26, 2019

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

John 14:23-29 Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. **24** Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

25 “All this I have spoken while still with you. **26** But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. **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.

28 “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. **29** I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.

“Remember the Sacrifice, Celebrate the Peace”

The D-Day invasion of Normandy during World War II was a monumental undertaking. Historian Stephen Ambrose compares the logistical challenge of Operation Overlord, the name for the military operation, to moving 3 medium sized Midwest cities across Lake Michigan to the other side in one night. It took two years to plan. It required the industrial strength and organization of the United States, the stiff upper lip of the United Kingdom, the dogged determination of the country of Canada and other allies. All those factors may have contributed to the success of the decisive operation that turned the tide of World War II. But that’s not what ultimately determined the fate of the operation.

Stephen Ambrose has written many acclaimed historical accounts of well-known events. One of his books was turned into the award winning miniseries “Band of Brothers” about one company of soldiers who landed on Normandy and pushed through other important battles. You can’t help watch those mini-movies or read the book without sensing a deep admiration for the brave soldiers who faced real dangers and made sacrifices most of us can barely imagine. Here is the assessment Ambrose offers about the outcome of the Normandy invasion back in 1944: “in the end success or failure in Operation Overlord came down to a relatively small number of junior officers, noncoms, and privates or seamen in the American, British, and Canadian armies, navies, air forces, and coast guards. If the paratroopers and glider borne troops covered behind hedgerows or hid out in barns rather than actively seek out the enemy; if the coxswains did not drive their landing craft ashore but instead, out of fear of enemy fire, dropped the ramps in too-deep water; if the men at the beaches dug in behind the seawall; if the noncoms and junior officers failed to lead their men up and over the seawall to move inland in the face of enemy fire — why, then, the most thoroughly planned offensive in military history, an offensive supported by incredible amounts of naval firepower, bombs, and rockets, would fail.” (Stephen Ambrose. D-Day, Illustrated Edition, p. 9) He is saying ordinary people displayed amazing bravery to follow orders to bring about the success of the mission.

This weekend, and especially tomorrow's holiday are great times for us to pause and reflect on the sacrifice made by so many to secure our freedom. So many of those soldiers and sailors and airmen would tell us their sacrifice was worth it so we could have peace. So as we remember and reflect, today is a great time to consider an even bigger sacrifice that brought a more lasting kind of peace. In John chapter 14 Jesus addresses disciples and prepares them for his inevitable departure. His disciples down through the ages will face very real enemies. They will be filled with so many different emotions. They will be pulled in so many different directions. And through it all, Jesus wants us to know we have peace. Jesus has made the ultimate sacrifice for every soul. Jesus leave us with his ultimate gift. His real, lasting peace gives security to our lives. His peace guides us until we are reunited with Jesus. So we can remember his sacrifice and celebrate his peace.

It's a little ironic, but the Gospel readings for the Sundays as we progress away from Easter take us back before Easter. In fact, last week's reading of John 13 and today's reading from John 14 take us back to the Upper Room with Jesus and the disciples on Maundy Thursday when they celebrated the Passover. Jesus knows what is coming next. The disciples, of course, are clueless. So Jesus has to give advice and a little pep talk the way a seasoned captain who has been through a couple of tours of duty and seen action in multiple contexts would try his best to prepare his fresh recruits who are being thrown into battle for the very first time. They can't possible know what they will face. There is really no way to prepare them for everything they will experience. But when the adrenaline kicks in and they find themselves in the thick of battle, he just hopes their training will kick in. In this emotionally fraught time when Jesus knows his cross is just around the corner, Jesus does something better. He gives a gift that the disciples will be able to fall back on and use for strength. Jesus tells confused and perplexed disciples of every age: **"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."** (John 14:26)

At this emotional and confusing time, Jesus promises not to abandon the disciples. His gift to them is the presence of God in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will be there for disciples, to reassure them and guide them as they face a deadly assortment of adversaries.

As we take a closer look at the words of Jesus here in John chapter 14, I realize how often we misunderstand the role of the Holy Spirit. So often, we think of the Holy Spirit as the mastermind behind some ambitious battle plan. When we start to feel overwhelmed, he comes in with superior fire power. When we are about to surrender, he unleashes the secret weapon. But Jesus doesn't promise the Holy Spirit is some mad scientist enabling us to unleash Avenger-level superpowers to take down all the bad guys. Jesus promises to give the Holy Spirit so we have the benefits of his sacrifice and so we can appreciate his victory. Remember the sacrifice, celebrate the peace.

We would never say that the enemy in World War II was easier than in other wars. But sometimes the most dangerous threats are the ones that can't be seen. No one else knows what you are battling. No one else realizes the daily struggle you face. It might be so sneaky,

you didn't even realize it until it blew up into a full-scale crisis. People who study these kinds of things can roll out a long list of statistics to show that divorce is just as common among Christians as it is in the general population. The same is true for pornography. Same for depression. The same for financial ruin and bankruptcy. They all affect Christians at the same rate as non-Christians.

To those common struggles we can add the pressure to provide for our families. To be the kind of father or mother our families need. To be the son or daughter for aging parents. Add to that the particularly painful battles of anger and disappointment when people have been unkind or insensitive. Pile onto that the sadness we experience from the tragedies of life. Stack onto that the impulse to withhold forgiveness from people who have hurt us intentionally or not. We certainly feel like we are at war. On a daily basis. Against enemies we can't even see. We can't pin down their position on a map and call in a bombing raid. Most of our fellow Christians don't even know what we are experiencing. We feel like we have to face these pressures all on our own. Add up the battles and skirmishes we face daily and it feels like they have succeeded in robbing us of peace.

This is where we see the value of military training. In the heat of battle, soldiers will get distracted and tempted to be thrown off task. Feelings will change thoughts. Thoughts will impact behaviors. But if actions are out of whack, then failure to carry out commands could throw the entire mission into jeopardy. When we face battles raging around us and within us, we can start to think we can only find peace when all the good people in the world band together to fight evil. We can convince ourselves that we can't have peace in our hearts without everything around us, all our circumstances changing. We can know on a head level that we have God's peace, but that peace just doesn't feel real in our daily experiences.

Failure to find peace in what Jesus gives us, robs us of the real peace only Jesus can give. Leaves us with empty earthly peace. No peace at all.

The first step is to realize Jesus doesn't promise to give that kind of peace we are so often after. Jesus doesn't promise disciples to get rid of every problem in our lives or wave a magic wand to get rid of the problem people in our lives. Jesus promises something better: **"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."** (John 14:27)

Jesus is your peace. Jesus loves you. Jesus loves you enough to keep God's Word in his heart so he carries out the work his Father sent him to do. Jesus brings peace by his cross. Jesus battles your sin. Jesus attacks your false priorities in life. Jesus subdues your misplaced focus for finding earthly peace. Jesus wages battle with our soul's greatest enemies. Jesus defeated the enemies that bring turmoil to your heart. Jesus destroyed the death that brings so much discouragement.

Peace is the reality of your relationship with God because of Jesus. Remember the sacrifice of Jesus. Celebrate the peace you have because of Jesus.

Martin Luther describes the value of this gift: "This is a very precious, final word, that He does not leave them cities and castles, or silver and gold, but His peace as the greatest

treasure in heaven and on earth. For My presence and preaching have taught you that I love you with all My heart, and desire only your good, and My Father looks upon you most graciously. This is the best gift I can leave to you. For this is the highest peace, when the heart is content." (LW, WA 45, 623)

This helps us appreciate why Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to his disciples. Jesus calls him the "Advocate." An advocate is someone who comes to your aid when you are in trouble. The Advocate speaks up to defend you with the work of Jesus and turn you away from your of accusations of how Jesus has failed to give you peace. The Advocate turns you away from your own defenses.

The Holy Spirit advocates to help you find your identity in Jesus Christ. You are not your addiction. You are not your failed marriage. You aren't your failure to live up to family expectations. You are not the anger eating away at you from the inside. You are not the grief that so often robs you of joy. You are a child of God. You are forgiven in Jesus Christ. You are an heir of eternal life.

The Holy Spirit is there for those attacks. Whether it is anger or sadness, bitterness or resentment. The Holy Spirit turns you back to the words of Jesus. The Holy Spirit points you back to the reality of your relationship with God established by Jesus. The Holy Spirit teaches and reminds.

When he issued the order to launch Operation Overlord, Dwight D. Eisenhower told his troops: "Good luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking." Jesus gives you more than luck. Jesus gives you victory. He leaves you the Holy Spirit to take that objective peace and make it real in your life. The Advocate reinforces the security and well-being you have in your relationships with God. The Advocate points you to the reality that isn't changed or impacted by your earthly understanding of peace. Your Advocate turns you away from the turmoil and discouragement in your heart. The sacrifice of Jesus fills the hearts of his disciples with his sacrificial love. His words give you reason to celebrate the peace that no one and nothing can take away from you. Remember his sacrifice, celebrate his peace. Amen.