

Saturday, May 9, 2020 Devotions , Rev. Angela Freeman-Riley, Bethesda on the Bay

Jesus says: 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. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

[John 14:27-29](#)

"Do not let your hearts be troubled..."

'Mmmmm, okay, sure, Jesus. I'll get right on that! But don't you know that most of the things I used to do to find peace when I was stressed, anxious, worried,... I can't really do them anymore? Don't you know, Jesus? There's an unseen danger in the world and I'm supposed to hunker down and not touch anything let alone give or receive hugs?! But you want me to not let my heart be troubled....'

I really wonder how many of us really receive this Word from Jesus easily and without first thinking, "are you kidding me?".... How many of us really come to understand and know the deep and abiding truth of that Peace that we are generously and abundantly offered through Jesus....?

This passage from John is from the Farewell Discourse between Jesus and his followers. He's trying to bolster them up before the Big Events to come when he will no longer be with them. They're hearts were surely troubled as the threat of Jesus' death loomed ever closer.

Peace.... Peace was what Jesus was promising as his final offering. Peace is what Jesus has left us as well. Abiding peace from God cannot be taken away from us by any circumstance. Jesus even comments on there being different kinds of peace.... "I do not give to you as the world gives..."

Oh, I long for peace... How we all long for peace....

You know, the peace normally am able to find in the presence of loved ones, in the presence of our church family; or in a joyful night out for dinner at my favorite restaurants; or in a trip to the beach or somewhere that I can "get away from it all!"

Living in Lakewood, one of my most peaceful places nearby to walk in Lakewood Park along the waterfront, or even in the Metro Parks in Rocky River. These places have been a source of peace for me... However, the parks are becoming more and more populated with groups of people not keeping appropriate social distances.... Even the places of finding peace during these last weeks of quarantine aren't working for me anymore! Finding this kind of peace from the world is certainly harder to find these days when you're sheltering in place at home!

But Jesus offers here that word of encouragement,... He reminds us that He gives peace right in the midst of trouble, right in the middle of distress and turmoil, heartache and pandemics. Jesus imparts peace to your soul right there, and not as the world gives....

Jesus's peace comes in the middle of the raging storm when the boat is rocking to and fro. There he is walking toward us on the water – the only one able to calm the storms. He stills the raging wind and calms the waves, so that we can rest in the boat content, knowing that no water can swallow the ship...

All those other tools that I use to calm myself and find peace..., they are important for a full and healthy life; but at the same time they're not complete, not offering the fullness of peace that only Jesus can give... In fact, I

know that I've falsely relied on myself and on those other things too often before... failing to first come before God through Jesus to really have my needs met.

"Let us pray to God that we may be free of God," the 13th century mystic Meister Eckhart wrote, implying that our conceptions of God most always fall short, always fail. Those imposter gods we conjure up because we perhaps fear or just can't quite understand the Mystery who really IS.

Today's confession perhaps...

I...we... shape these gods in our own image, and they often serve us as much as we serve them. Today, let's dare to commit ourselves to the long good-bye to be free of those things that don't serve us. Time to let go of those gods that just can't attend to our deepest needs. Even letting go of the ways of relating to Jesus and trusting him that have served us for years and are no longer doing so. Changing our thinking and attuning our hearts a new is HARD WORK!

The biggest god who I'm struggling to let go of is the bargain god. The god of transactions and deals... You know what I mean: "If I go and do XYZ, then god will do ABC." Or even as simple as, "If I behave, then I'll be loved or I'll stay safe." Another is, "If I work hard, I'll earn forgiveness." Another imposter, "If I'm the best, then I'll earn a blessing"...

I have a hunch you know what I mean... We're all at least a little familiar with those kind of gods. Today, I pray for the courage to say goodbye again and again and again to these gods – all of the gods who keep me from apprehending the One who really is. Abiding in the God who dwells in mystery. The God who says, "I have to go now, but I'll still be with you. Things are changing, but you are not alone." Praying to this God is the key to peace. Trusting in this God is the center of freedom. We all thrive under this God's care.

I know it can seem like a tall order right now to "not let your heart be troubled." To trust that you do in fact know the way – the quiet, unglamorous, risky, but ultimately life-giving way of Jesus. But dear ones, you do... Like Thomas, like Philip, like Peter, like the others, you know Jesus. You know his life, his love, his death and his resurrection. You know what it is to hunger for him, to seek him, to listen for him, to home in him. You know the Way...

Though we may feel alone and frightened right now, the Way is open before us. We know Jesus, and because we know Jesus, we know God. the Way will safely bear us home. Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Yours along the way,

Pastor Angela

Receive this blessing upon you and the world today:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUtIl3mNj5U&list=WL&index=2&t=301s>