**Last Thoughts: Spirit of Peace**

**3-22-20**

Well, this is unusual, isn’t it.

* How many times have we heard someone say – or even said ourselves – “I just wish the world would stop for a while so I could catch up”?
  + Well, here you go. Probably not quite what you were hoping for, but our current circumstances seem to have had that effect.
  + And we find ourselves in caught between being deeply disconcerted over an uncertain future and yet having this strange upbeat attitude about being given permission to slow down and stay home.
    - It reminds me of days at the beach on a steamy mid-summer day in the Minnesota.
      * You’re having a great time frolicking in the water, but become well aware of gathering storm clouds on the western horizon.
      * The condition are right for a severe thunderstorm or even a tornado, so you’re hoping they’ll dissipate or go around.
      * But little by little you become more concerned as thunder begins to growl in the distance the winds begin to shift and cool.
    - Disconcerting, yes, but not yet a worry.

I imagine Jesus’ disciples were experiencing a bit of that same feeling in the week following the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem.

* They had just been basking in the brilliance of what they saw as the beginning of Jesus’ ascension to power and fame in Israel.
  + His profile and popularity were at all-time highs, and people had taken notice with some wanting to make Him King.
  + It seemed all those long, hard days on the road these last three years were finally about to pay off.
* But the vibe around Jesus, Himself, had become disconcerting.
  + At His greatest moment, Jesus was speaking of leaving, of suffering and of death.
    - And here in the upper room, everything had taken on a surreal, almost funeral like, atmosphere…
    - …as Jesus began sharing what sounded like his last thoughts with them.
  + Now Jesus had always been a little enigmatic to them – what with his parables and strange resistance to the limelight.
    - But this was different – darker and almost depressing, even though he was speaking words of comfort.
    - The disciples probably weren’t exactly sure what to think.

But Jesus did. He knew exactly what was about to happen. In fact, He told them:

*“You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’* (Mark 14:27)

* So Jesus sought to speak words of comfort to them to prepare them for what was about to happen.

*29 And now I have told you,* [He said in vs 29], *before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe.*

* But Jesus did more than just give them WORDS to comfort them, He gave them something far more practical. (Jn 14:26-27)

*25 “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.*

* + Jesus doesn’t just give His disciples trending platitudes, comforting memes and hope against hope.
  + He gives them something real, something tangible, something that makes a difference.
    - Now we all know, and shake our heads over the fact, that toilet paper is now in short supply.
      * Not because it is a product that fights off the corona virus and is thus in high demand (like hand sanitizer).
      * Nor because it is an imported item that is in short supply due to disruptions of trade routes (like some face masks).
      * On the contrary, toilet paper is made from an abundant resource right here in our own country.
    - No, the only reason toilet paper is in short supply is that somehow it brings people comfort.
      * And not only in the physical sense!
      * The Charmin company is probably thrilled to learn that it’s product apparently brings people psychological and emotional comfort as well.
      * According to one analyst I read this week, toilet paper hording gives people a sense of control in an uncontrolled situation.
    - Talk about single-ply comfort!
* Jesus, on the other hand, provides his disciples a tangible, robust comfort that can sustain them (and us) though both disconcerting times and disastrous times.

So, as Jesus prepares to leave his disciples, He says that

1. *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you*.

* But that’s kind of like saying, “I’m leaving, but I’m not really leaving”. In vs. 19, He continues:

*19 Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.*

* So how does that work, exactly? How can He be leaving and staying at the same time?
  + How can He be visible to His disciples but invisible to everyone else?
* He tells them twice:
  + First in vs. 16 he says:

*16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth…18 You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*

* + And then again in vs. 26

*26 But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

* It is in this way, Jesus says that:

*28 ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’* both.

*25 “These things* [Jesus said in vs. 25] *I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But* [in the future]*…the Holy Spirit…will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

* So how can Jesus be leaving and yet be present? Be visible and yet be invisible?
  + He will do it through the presence of His Holy Spirit.

But, it’s not like the disciples were grasping everything Jesus was saying here.

* I’m sure it was all pretty confusing to them as they tried to follow along with how Jesus was going and yet staying
  + In fact, later in the conversation we read that the disciples even talked to each other about it.
    - In John 16:17 we read:

*17 So some of his disciples said to one another, “What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going to the Father?*

* Of course, Jesus knew they didn’t understand, which is why He said in vss. 12-14

*12 “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...*

* + But this first introduction to this new arrangement with the coming of the Holy Spirit was a lot for them to grapple with – and left them baffled and disconcerted.

And to be honest, it can be a bit of a challenge for us to grasp as well.

* But the key thought in all of this teaching on the Holy Spirit is that He is truly the Spirit of Jesus sent to us by the Father to be the living presence of Jesus in us every moment of every day.
  + Jesus told His disciples that this new arrangement was even better for them than His physical presence!
    - A presence that was limited by time and location and weariness.
      * In other words, Jesus couldn’t be in two places at once.
      * He couldn’t speak personally to multiple individuals at the same time.
      * He couldn’t calm a storm while he was sleeping in the boat.
    - But in this new arrangement, His Spirit would indwell every believer simultaneously.
      * Teaching each one according to their need.
      * Gifting each one for the task at hand.
      * Empowering each one according to God’s perfect design.
      * And filling each one with the fruit of His presence.
  + Jesus said that this is BETTER, because in this arrangement,

*12 …whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do;* ***and greater works than these will he do****, because I am going to the Father.*

* + - No longer a single man in one place, by His Spirit Jesus is present in men, women and children all over the world.
    - The effect of which Peter declares when he quotes the prophet Joel in Acts 2:17-18

*“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.*

* Now today, we know this arrangement as The Church.
  + An assembly of people joined together in perfect unity by this same Holy Spirit that Jesus promised so long ago.
    - For, according to Eph 4:4:

*4 There in one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

* + - What a brilliant, amazing (if not a bit confounding) arrangement indeed.

But on that day – that disconcerting day – that day of mixed messages of victory and impending disaster on the horizon…

* On that day, Jesus was not telling His disciples about the coming of the Spirit to reveal to them the NEW body of Christ – His church.
* No, on that day, Jesus revealed this coming new arrangement for a completely different purpose:
  + So that as the wheels began to come off in the hours and days ahead, leading to the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, His disciples would still know the peace of His presence.
  + This is why in vs. 14 Jesus says to them:

*27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.*

And here is what I want you to see on this morning when we cannot meet together as a body due to a virus that could decimate the health of both citizens and the economy.

* Jesus cares deeply about our fears – whether rational or irrational – and makes provision for us to bring us peace in the midst of a disconcerting reality.
  + And He does so in no small way.
    - For this coming Spirit of truth, who is given to teach us, to equip us, to transform us, to enable us, to empower us and, ultimately, to perfect us…
  + This same Spirit on that day in the upper room was given simply to comfort us.
    - After all, back in vs 16 Jesus spoke of the Spirit as being *another comforter* – one like Him.
    - And here, in vs. 27, He refers to that same Spirit as *my peace* which He is giving to us.

Now If you don’t look at the context of these verses, you might miss this.

* Let’s look at vss. 26-28
  + In the verse vs. 26, Jesus speaks of the Father sending something: the Spirit, referring to Him this time not as the Spirit of truth, but as the “Comforter” or “Helper”.
  + Immediately following, in vs 27, Jesus speaks of leaving something and giving something: namely His peace. (Pointing out that this is not the same as when the world gives peace).
  + And then in vs 28, Jesus speaks of Himself leaving and yet coming to His disciples.
* Now clearly, that which is sent is vs. 26 and that which is coming in vs. 28 are both referring to the Holy Spirit.
  + Which would contextually require that that which is left and given in vs. 27 would also be referring to the Holy Spirit.
  + So, when Jesus says:

*27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you…*

* + - That peace is none other that the person of the Holy Spirit Himself.
    - As the Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 2:14, *He himself is our peace…*
  + So the Holy Spirit, to whom Jesus gives titles such as “the Spirit of Truth” and the “Comforter” is also our Peace.
* Here the gift of the Spirit is spoken of in terms of His being tangible, living peace.
  + So as believers, we are not limited to the platitudes or treaties of this world.
    - And we are not dependent on the empty comforts of a stuffed animal or a 20 pack of toilet paper.
  + No, our peace is a living being who lives within us and abides with us: the Holy Spirit of Jesus.

Do we grasp the difference?

* In the disconcerting days of viruses and teetering economies, our peace is not found by achieving some Zen-like quality.
  + Enduring peace is not a discipline,
    - It does not come out of a bottle or a vile,
    - It’s not achieved by governments or presidents
    - It’s not dependent upon armies or wealth
    - And it’s not based upon empty comparisons, a relative peace since things are not as bad as they could be.
* Rather, enduring peace is found by leaning into the Spirit of Peace Who lives within us:
  + The peace Jesus left for us.
  + His peace which is the person of His Holy Spirit abiding in us.

But how does one lean into that peace, especially in unprecedented days, like the ones we are living in?

Here are a few points the Scriptures share with us:

* First, identify your anxiety and bring it to Jesus.
  + The Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Pet. 5:7

*7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

* + Generalized fear and anxiety is always more powerful than a specific fear.
    - So lean in to Jesus and ask Him to reveal to you your core fears and concerns so you can lay them at His feet.
    - Write them down and pray them out.
  + The Apostle Paul makes the same recommendation, but with a promise in Ephesians 4,

*6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

* + Specify and cast your anxieties on Him and the Spirit of peace will fill you with peace.
* A second bit of advice comes from Paul from whom we learn to lay out the worst case scenario and affirm how even then the Spirit of peace will abound.
  + Paul does this in Romans 8 when he writes about all kinds of worst-case scenarios – many of which he had personally faced:

*35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

* + - But he doesn’t stop there, but goes on to consider what might happen with all the powers of heaven and hell aligned against him:

*38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

* + And after looking at the worst case and considering it in light of Christ and all God has done for us through Him, he concludes:

*31 If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

* + Paul brought to God all his worst-case scenarios, imagining what might happen and considering whether Jesus was enough.
    - And in every instance, Paul concludes in the power of the Spirit of Peace that, indeed, Jesus is enough, no matter what the powers of earth and hell might hurl at us.
* And a third bit of advice for how to lean into the Spirit of Peace that lives within you is to enlist others to pray with you and for you.
  + For all Paul’s strength and assurance, even He needed the prayers of his partners in the Gospel to stand up when he needed to.
    - We see Paul asking the Roman church to pray for him, as well as the Philippian, Colossian and Thessalonian churches.
    - And he asks the Ephesians specifically to pray for courage in the face of danger.

1. *Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*
   * Now if the great Apostle Paul repeatedly asked for his friends to pray for him – and specifically for courage for him – then why would we hesitate to ask our friends to pray for us as well.

All of these are tried and true ways by which the Apostles leaned into the living peace that abides within every follower of Jesus.

* So lean in on the Spirit of Peace who Jesus intentionally left for you and gave to you for such days as these.
* This is the very same Spirit that comforted the grieving disciples on Good Friday, transformed them on Easter Sunday, and empowered them at Pentecost.
* And it is the same Spirit today Who will bring us peace, come hell or high water – because He IS our peace.
  + Lean in on Him today.