

Sunday, May 17 2020

I Peter 3:13-22 and John 14:15-31

“The Spirit in You”

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! We rejoice on this Sixth Sunday of Easter because the Spirit of God is amongst us as we worship separately but together! We gather to praise God because His Son Jesus was dead and is alive forevermore! Our focus today continues the teachings of Jesus prior to his arrest, trial and death. It is in these teachings that Jesus is trying to get the disciples to fully understand who he is and that he would soon leave them. We must remember that Jesus and the disciples have become very close as a group. Jesus' popularity as a teacher continues to grow. He has healed people and he has raised the questions of who he is in relationship with God the Father. But it seems that the disciples are just not sure.

Jesus has compassion for them and he tells them, "I will not leave you like orphans; I will give you another Advocate- the Spirit to be with you forever. The Spirit will come and guide you and will live in you". One can just imagine Thomas or Peter's question being asked, "But what do you mean the Spirit will live in us? How do we know what this means? We can only imagine Jesus trying to explain all that was to occur as his life's story on Earth would soon be changing. And then to explain the Holy Spirit, too!

This morning like many other Sunday mornings during our times of worship we have heard the statement and response, "May the peace of Christ be with you. And also with you." When physically together, we would normally turn to others and shake hands or in some churches we walk all over the church and give hugs in the few minutes allowed for this before we sing songs of praise. But what does this mean and why do we do it? This is an important question being raised because depending upon our local church traditions, this passing of peace has included hugs, handshakes, greetings of kisses and even discusses about what occurred the night before. It is a concern for many for when we will return to our church buildings and actually see each other and worship together in one space. The question arises, will we do this or should we? The question is why is it a part of our worship time? How will we modify this for post COVID19 worship experiences when social distancing will remain a standard practise for months to come?

In our reading from John 14, Jesus states, "My peace I give you." And then he clarifies this by saying, "not as the world gives, but my peace I give to you." What was Jesus doing at the time of this teaching? Jesus was with the disciples and teaching them about what was going

to happen. He knew that he would be denied by Peter. He has spoken to them calling himself the ‘way, truth and life’ and now he is promising the disciples that they would not be abandoned when he returned to the Father in heaven.

The disciples were not certain about what he meant but when he states, “My peace I give you.” It is a significant moment because his peace would be different from anything else anyone would receive. When we share in the passing of Christ’s peace we need to think of this moment from the disciples’ point of view. What does it mean to receive Christ’s peace?

We might think that this phrase implies that one person passes peace to the person next to them in the way one would pass the potatoes to someone next to them while eating supper. It is understandable to think of it that way, because of the words we use. But something else is actually going on. At the passing of the peace, we are not actually attempting to directly give divine peace to those around us. Rather, we are expressing our sincere desire that God will give them this gift. By saying, “peace be with you,” we are, in essence, offering a prayer on behalf of the people around us. It is very similar to saying something like, “May God bless you.” Obviously, when we say that, we are not pretending that we ourselves possess the capacity to impart divine blessings by our own strength. We are simply wishing, prayerfully, that God’s blessing will come to that person. In our context of worship, we are actually asking God to bless those around us and amongst us with a message or to have the Spirit reach the hearts of others in a new way. All we need to do is really say, “May God’s peace be upon you” and look the other person in the eye, acknowledging them as a brother or sister in Christ and that we are all worshiping God to receive blessings and new understanding for our every day life.

But Jesus did not stop with offering his peace. He also stated that “the Spirit is in you.” Jesus told the disciples that when he would return to the Father, the Spirit of truth would be with them forever. He further explains that the Spirit cannot be received by the world because it neither sees nor knows him. Then Jesus says, “You know him, because he abides with you and he will be in you.” So I ask, “Do you know the Spirit that Jesus is referring to? Is this Spirit living in you, now and in this moment that we share as one body in Christ? Do you consciously know that the Spirit is with you? Maybe we need to define who/ what this Spirit is at this time.?

Disney’s “The Lion King 2” opening song is a haunting call to the lions and tigers to come together for a new beginning with ‘the spirit of life’ reaching out to them. They are listening to all those who went before them, the patriarchal leadership of each generation which includes the sons and daughters of the whole nation. As the lyrics state, they are to “hear these words

and have faith. He lives in you. He lives in me He watches over Everything we see. Into the water. Into the truth In your reflection He lives in you." Just who is this He? The One who gives life and whose spirit lives in each one. The Spirit is God.

As believers in Jesus, we have been justified by God, forgiven of sins, and given the hope and promise of eternal life. But there is more! For when we receive and know Christ, there is a union between the Spirit of God and our human spirit. John 3:6 tells us that as people we were born of flesh, yet when we profess our faith, we receive the spirit of life within us by God's Spirit. Within our hearts and minds we also receive the Spirit (big s) and begin our faith life- not alone but with God's Spirit in us.

We are God's children, made by the creator, but when we believe and receive the Spirit we are united with God and we know God is in us. As we live our human life we continue to experience God's Spirit in us through what we say and do for this is how we are called to share Christ's love. We just need to do this more freely! We are God's children and God's Spirit is in us guiding and leading and helping us to live a full and abundant life. Because God's Spirit is in us, we must also realize that he will guide us to do good and we will be blessed. We have nothing to fear all we need to do is trust God's Spirit and enable our identity our self- our spirit (small s) to freely emerge.

Like many people around the world there is anxiety about when things will 'return to normal'. Many people are realizing that there will only be a new normal. Life before covid19 stay at home orders will not be returning as it once did. In these 8 weeks or so, people have had to come up with a new routine on how to live, shop, and even have fun. And for some of us, our spirits have ceased to function properly. Some people have lost the capacity to recognize, appreciate and engage in life as something more than a series of tasks, responsibilities and obligations. What is needed is a spiritual intervention that is, a time for our minds and hearts to be inspired in new ways. To really look at our lives from within our hearts and spirits to observing things we have not seen before or at all. We need to take time to look for the woodpecker you can hear; to look at the beautiful oriole as it sits and eats or to walk in the woods after a rain shower and see birds and small animals emerge and then take a deep breath. The air you breathe renews your physical self but it is also the spirit of new hope which enlightens your thoughts and leads you to something new- an inner peace which is calming and effective.

There are signs and symptoms of inner peace which indicate spiritual vitality, that is a delicate state of being in which we are at one with life, ourselves, others and nature. This means that the relationship between our inner spirit and God's spirit is strong and continuing to grow. And this is what each of us should be striving to attain. When Jesus places his peace upon the disciples and all who believe and have faith in him, he states receive peace within your hearts and live. Know that God's Spirit is in you. Live and have this peace.

Tom Stella writes in CPR for the Soul, that if we have truly received and live out Christ's peace we have the following symptoms of inner peace:

- 1 The tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than from fears.
2. The ability to enjoy each moment
3. Loss of interest in judging self and others
- 4 Loss of interest in conflict
- 5 Disinterest in interpreting the acts of others
- 6 Loss of the ability to worry
- 7 Frequent episodes of appreciation
- 8 Feeling connected to others and nature
- 9 Frequent attacks of smiling through the eyes of the heart and
- 10 the increasing tendency to let things happen rather than to make them happen. (p.108)

So the question that we each need to reflect upon is simply, have you received Christ's peace within? Are you working towards a fuller understanding of God's Spirit meeting your spirit in you? What are you doing to achieve this? Are you praying to God knowing that Christ is with you and that His Spirit is calling you to serve, to live and to be? The Spirit in you is God in relationship with what makes you, you. May your spirit be filled with peace. Amen.

Let us pray:

God our creator, Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit we praise you and pray that we may know you as you offer your peace. Help us to know you as our spirits bind with you as a friend who walks with us and that you are always with us. May we receive your Spirit in faith and hope in this quiet moment. Amen.

Let us rejoice and know that God's Spirit is with us as we sing and praise God know that Jesus is our friend who is always with us. Let us sing "What a Friend" 664 VU