

John 14:23-29

Jesus said to Judas (not Iscariot), "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 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."

I think that, if you were to ask most people what they were looking for in life, and they were really to think about it, the answer wouldn't be happiness, or fun, or even purpose. I think deep down people are looking for peace and contentment. How they go about finding that is all over the board.

They might travel to a small, quaint town of about 13,000 located in east-central MA by named of Grafton. In this town sits a modest-sized Victorian house, not far from downtown. Inside the perimeter of tall bushes there is a large garden with a winding sidewalk that leads to and from the house.

Headquartered in this old house is the Center for Inner Peace where people come together and try to quiet themselves so they can find that peace that they believe is within them if they just exert enough self-control. So they gather in the front room with overstuffed chairs and pillows on the floor, or in the peace garden out front, and take on the task of saying the right words and breathing in the right way so they can bring forth peace in their lives.

Or maybe they would head to Malibu, to a palatial mansion that is there. Sitting on mats they would meet with Kali of the Self-Realization Fellowship who will serve as their guide for their inner journey to peace. She tells the people there that they can be like interior designers of their minds. Move things around, change things up, however they would like in order to create their personal peace. At a Sunday service on reincarnation the officiating swami tells them that in order to find inner peace and true happiness they simply need to find their own divinity.

All over the world, people are searching for this thing that seems so elusive. So, how is your search going? Some, like Kali, look inside themselves in order to achieve that feeling that they desire so much. Most, however, don't. Most look elsewhere, outside themselves. And let's face it, the world is more than happy to offer things. Things that will provide a feeling, fill the void. Or at least things that will distract us enough, so that we can think we have found peace.

I'm sure we could come up with a long list this morning. Some people find it in mind-numbing substances. Here is a stat that you probably haven't heard. In 2014, the most recent data that I could find, annual retail sales for alcohol in the U.S. was over \$211 billion? That equals about \$963, or over \$80 per month, for every man, woman, child, and baby; every human being in the US. On top of that, a Department of Education study found that the use of marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy and other drugs were epidemically on the rise among high school students; in this was before the law changes in Colorado, and Oregon. They are looking for something. They are looking for something that is missing from their lives. Might I add that there has been a reverse correlation in this area to the decline in family attendance in church.

Some find their peace and contentment in money, but from my experience with people with significant bank accounts, money can buy many things, comfort, toys, options; but peace is typically not one of them. Try Googling Powerball winners and read many of their stories.

Or we look for our peace in relationships. Where romance is redefined as having a life span of less than 12 hours, friendship is reduced to a click on a social media site and can be equally reversed with a contrary click, and commitment is determined by the next thing to come out of a person's mouth and how it ranks on the other person's ultra-sensitive offense meter.

Believe it or not, it is all about finding peace. Everyone is looking for peace. Everyone is seeking peace in a world that seems to be spring-loaded to squash it.

So where do we find our's? Is it in money and power? Can we find it in chemicals or in work? Do we find it in serial physical relationships, effortless digital friendship, or do we have to just wait for happy hour at the local pub? Can we find it in our many worldly options or is it found in our inner divinity sitting on a pillow in Malibu as our credit card is run in the next room?

Here is what Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid”.

Jesus is telling us that the peace he gives is something entirely different from what we can find in the world. The peace that the world offers is a feeling. It is something to be acquired and possessed, but it’s fleeting. Peace, as given by the world, is only temporary and it requires continual effort on our part along with a pin number and processing fee.

On the other hand, what Jesus offers us is the peace that we often describe in our liturgy as the one which surpasses all our understanding. The peace that Christ gives to us cannot be possessed because it is not simply a salve that lays over our hurts and our fears so that they might be covered up for a time. His peace is not just a method by which we blot out our struggles and our hurts and our pain. The peace that Christ gives, the peace that he is talking about this morning, is not a means in order to produce a feeling. Instead it’s an action by which he produces a transformation. Sure, there is a feeling that comes with it, a good feeling, but at its core it doesn’t just give us something, it makes us something. My peace I give to you...my peace I leave with you. While we heard last Sunday that people will know us as disciples by our love, I think that they might also marvel at us because of the deep peace that that love can bring.

Jesus not only gives us his peace, which is unlike anything the world can give, but then he promises to leave it within us. It doesn’t come and go because it is not something we have, it is not a product that we purchase, but rather it’s something that we are. I know that is hard to understand for many in the world, but we don’t just have peace, we are peace-filled. We are a reflection of Christ’s peace. It doesn’t eliminate struggle, it put us into a new relationship with it.

Another story you may remember that I have shared before, but it is worth repeating...

There once was a King who offered a prize to the artist who could paint the best picture of peace. Many artists from around the countryside submitted their works. The King looked at all the pictures, and it came down to two finalists. One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror that reflected the peaceful towering mountains that were all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with a bright sun and fluffy white clouds. Everyone who saw this picture thought that it was without a doubt a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains too. But these mountains were rugged and bare. Above them was an angry sky from which rain fell and lightning flashed. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a raging waterfall. You could almost hear the deafening roar of the water and felt the terrible rumble. The people that looked at that picture scratched their heads. They thought that it didn’t look peaceful at all. But they didn’t see something that the king saw. He saw that just

behind the furious waterfall a tiny bush was growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water and stormy skies, sat the mother bird on her nest in perfect peace.

Well, the King chose the second picture. He explained that he chose it because, “peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. True peace is not to be found by manipulating our surroundings to self-produce a feeling to hide behind. True peace comes from finding its source and bringing it deep inside yourself so that even when you are in the midst of all those things; all the noise and the struggle and the hard work you can still be calm in your heart. That,” the king said, “is the real meaning of peace.”

That is the promise that Christ offers for all mankind.

Amen