

The Promise of the Holy Spirit  
(or, “Is It Good News For Our  
Troubled Hearts Today?”)

John 14:23-29, NRSV

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Oakland Avenue PCUSA – Rock Hill  
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**JOHN 14:23-29, NRSV**

Jesus is speaking:

23 *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.*

24 *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.*

25 *I have said these things to you while I am still with you.*

26 *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.*

27 *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.*

28 *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.*

29 *And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.*

Last week **Anne Kolb Roddey** died. She was 86 years old and died with a song in her heart. Although Anne Kolb Roddey was born and grew up in Oakland Avenue Church, most of her life was spent elsewhere in the world, sharing her gifts and love of music. One of the passages of Scripture which I used at the Memorial Service here in our chapel last Monday was the passage that we have before us as the gospel reading from the Common

Lectionary for today. It is a passage which I often use at funerals.

The setting for these significant words of Jesus is THE LAST SUPPER in that famous “upper room.” It is the week that we have come to call “Holy Week,” and Jesus has gathered with his disciples to celebrate the Passover meal.

The gospel writer John remembers that after supper, Jesus has gotten up from the table and has washed the feet of his disciples in a powerful symbol of Jesus' understanding of his role as the SERVANT MESSIAH.

And then, the gospel writer John records Jesus' words of interpretation of what he has just done, washing the feet of the disciples. Jesus says:

*“Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord---and you are right, for that is what I am. So, if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”* (John 13:12b-17, NRSV)

Then, following this POWERFUL symbol which calls us disciples right here in Rock Hill to be servants to other people in the name of God, Jesus continues to speak to his disciples-----and to us.

And it is in this after-dinner speech that the words of today's text are found, words of Jesus which deliver to us a wonderful gift-----

#### THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Jesus said:

*“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Counselor, 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. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Let not your hearts be troubled; neither let them be afraid.”* (John 14:25-27)

I have been an ordained Presbyterian minister for 43 years. I have learned a great deal over that period. One of the lessons of which I am continually reminded is the lesson of **HOW FRAGILE IS THIS LIFE OF OURS!**

How delicate is our existence in this world of ours!

***And it is the gift of God's presence with us in our fragile life, in our delicate existence, that makes all the difference.***

Do you understand what I am saying? Would you agree with me on this?

***It is the gift of God's presence, the Holy Spirit, which makes all the difference.***

Now, it may be that the valley of the shadow of death is not where you have been this past week.

YOUR valley may have been shadowed by loneliness or by addiction of some kind, or by estrangement from a loved one, or by failure in some part of your life.

Whatever may be the valley through which we all must go at some time, the journey is made easier by the gift of the presence of God, the Holy Spirit. And that gift is one which is sensed or understood only by believers!

Are YOU a believer? Jesus said:

*“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Counselor, 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. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”* (John 14:25-27)

One old preacher’s tale has it that there was a contest in which artists were to submit paintings and sculptures portraying their understanding of peace. Some showed beautiful sunsets, others pastoral scenery. But the prize went to an artist, who had painted a bird in its nest, and the nest had been built on a branch, and the branch was growing out of a rock protruding right in the center of the great thundering Niagara Falls.

Now, I do not know for certain, but I would think that it takes an exceptional peace, a supernatural peace, to prevail in the midst of great, outward trouble and inner distress. It is evident that the artist who painted the bird sitting on the nest in the midst of that great thundering waterfall was trying to tell us something.

LISTEN TO THIS: *the peace of Christ* is just like that; *the peace of Christ* is exceptional and supernatural; *the peace of Christ* is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Since I have been your Interim Pastor here at Oakland Avenue PCUSA, I am not sure that I have made use of one of my favorite writers; he is the Presbyterian minister and novelist, ***Frederick Beuchner***.

In his book, *Wishful Thinking*, Beuchner has this to say about PEACE:

Peace has come to mean the time when there aren’t any wars or even when there aren’t any major wars. Beggars can’t be choosers; we’d most of us settle for that. But in Hebrew, peace, *shalom*, means fullness; it means having everything you need to be wholly and happily yourself.

One of the titles by which Jesus is known is Prince of Peace, and he used the word himself in what seems at first glance to be two radically contradictory utterances. On one occasion he said to the disciples, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” (Matthew 10:34) And later on, the last time they ate together, he said to them, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” (John 14:27)

The contradiction is resolved when you realize that for Jesus peace seems to have meant not the absence of struggle but the presence of love. (Beuchner, Frederick, Wishful Thinking, New York, Harper & Rowe, Publishers, 1973, p. 69)

NOW LISTEN TO THIS: In the upper room setting when Jesus used the word “**Peace**” or “**Shalom**” in his final talk with his disciples, it was for them a **promise** that the PEACE of God, the SHALOM of God, the GREETING OF GOD was going to be continually coming to the faithful disciples through the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, Jesus could tell them:

Do not let your hearts be troubled

and do not let them be afraid.

DO YOU THINK THAT IS GOOD NEWS FOR OUR TROUBLED HEARTS TODAY?

It is GOOD NEWS if one is preparing to be separated from loved ones because of school commencement or the possibility of marriage.

It is GOOD NEWS if one is undergoing hospitalization for surgery or medical treatment such as dialysis or chemotherapy.

It is GOOD NEWS if you have lost your job and are forced to seek employment in a new field or in another place.

It is GOOD NEWS if one is trying to throw off the burden of some sin in the past which continues to mar your life and your hopes.

It is GOOD NEWS if you are wrestling with death, either your own death or the death of a loved one, and your heart is broken.

Jesus said: “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.”

*Now, my friends, I want to say something to you and see if you agree.*

You do not have to agree with me; you know that.

But I wonder if you will agree.

**God gives us believers “Peace” in our troubled hearts here at Oakland Avenue PCUSA in worship on Sundays IN ORDER THAT you and I can then minister to the troubled hearts of our neighbors and the rest of the world.**

Do you think that is true?

**God gives us believers “Peace” in our troubled hearts here at Oakland Avenue PCUSA in worship on Sundays IN ORDER THAT you and I can then minister to the troubled hearts of our neighbors and the rest of the world.**

And the “troubled hearts” of our neighbors and the rest of the world include:

THE GIRL who runs the cash register at Food Lion, and

THE PERSON getting her body repaired in Piedmont Medical Center, and

THE STUDENT from India who is studying pedagogy at Winthrop, and

THE MIGRANT who is passing through Rock Hill, looking for work, and

THE OBNOXIOUS PERSON working beside us in the office, and

THE LADY who is bed-bound because of age and illness, and

THE MAN whose wife has run off leaving him & the kids to go it alone, and

THE MOTHER who has four children and no health care or job, and so on and so on and so on....

My friends, it is my suspicion that you and I may have troubled hearts simply because we get so tied-up in our own concerns that we forget both God and our neighbors. **DO YOU EVER FIND THAT TO BE TRUE?**

**SO**, in our separation from our families and from those whom we love, and in our experiences of hospitalization and therapy and illness, and in our fears about our vocations and our jobs, or lack of them, and in our carrying around heavy burdens of our sins of the past, and in our worrying and fretting about our own death and our resurrection,

## YOU AND I NEED TO LISTEN AGAIN TO THE WORDS OF JESUS:

Jesus said: “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.”

This past Tuesday I was surprised and pleased that retired Winthrop Professor of Economics, Robert Cooper, came by the church office to welcome me to Rock Hill. He grew up in Clemson, and I had the funerals of both his momma and his daddy. His Daddy, Roy Cooper, the Clemson YMCA version of Rock Hill’s Robert Hope, was on the Pulpit Nominating Committee which brought me to Clemson in 1980. I told Robert Cooper how much I enjoyed his momma and daddy, and I told him one of the many “Roy Cooper Stories” that continue to wander around Clemson.

Roy said that there were two deaf men who were members of the Fort Hill PCUSA in Clemson where I worked, and they were very regular in their attendance at worship. On the first Sunday that Jim Richardson preached, these two old men were sitting on the back pew of the sanctuary. After I had been preaching for about 30 minutes, one old timer turned to the other old timer and asked: “**What’s he talking about?**” To which the other old timer responded: “**He ain’t said yet!**”

I tell you that story to say to you this morning that you must have been dozing off if you do not know what I have been saying this morning.

And just in case, I have been telling you to believe these words of Jesus;

Jesus said: “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.”

Now, if you came to worship this morning just hoping that you would hear some GOOD NEWS, you just did!