

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Sixth Sunday of Easter - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Acts 16:9-15

Psalm 67

Revelation 21:10,22-22:5

John 14:23-29

05/26/2019

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

23Jesus answered [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. 24Whoever 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. 26But 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. 27Peace 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. 28You 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. 29And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.”

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Peace

Good morning! It happened every year at Camp Luther in Cowen, WV. So old was the tradition that its origin was lost in antiquity. I loved every day that I was able to spend at camp, but I especially looked forward to two days in particular: Guy-Hug-A-Girl-Day and Girl-Hug-A-Guy-Day. Every year at camp they would make an intentional push for people to go out and meet new friends. When I was in elementary school it was popular to get the MOST hugs, so kids would keep track all day, trying to get the largest amount of hugs. By middle school, it was “uncool” to seem too invested in the hallowed of days, but by high school the popularity was back! And in high school the hugs took on another important dimension; they became intentional and meaningful. The goal of the hugs at this point went beyond specific days, they became a welcome in the morning for friends, a place of support during breaks in class, an exclamation as one waited for lunch, and a hello in the afternoon. The best hugs were before dinner, after everyone had a chance to get a shower and we all smelled our best.

Girl-Hug-A-Guy-Day and Guy-Hug-A-Girl-Day have since been wisely ended. Not everyone likes hugs, and some people don't want to be touched. But that pattern of hello has always been an engrained part of who I am and how I show love. I'm a “hugger” for lack of a better word. In high school, it was how my friends said hello, and

it was never an intentional thing, it was just who we were. Hugging was subconsciously built into our circle of friends.

But there has always been one place where hugs have been even more important for me, and it happens every time I worship, right after the prayers, when we share a sign of peace. You see, the hugs, handshakes, and hellos that are shared during that time are holy. They are visible reminders of the peace that Jesus Christ brings into our lives.

That's what I love so much about that part of the text in today's Gospel reading: *"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."* I have often wondered what Jesus meant by "I do not give to you as the world gives." I think that it has a lot to do with the selflessness that comes from a peace that Jesus extends. When the world offers "peace" we hold back, we never give fully. Sometimes, the actions of "peace" look much different than what God intends. As I stand in a room full of service women and men on Memorial Day weekend I wonder how many others are alone. I pray for the day that military sacrifice is no longer needed. As Christians, our hands aren't clean, many horrible things have been done in the name of God and God's peace. No, our peace and God's are two different things.

Which, may be why hugs mean so much to me, they're (as my ethics professor used to say) signs of the kingdom. Small glimpses of the good that God has planned. One commentator wrote the following:

"Anxiety, fear, and trouble hearts are much on Jesus' mind. The antidote to such fear is the peace, given by Jesus, and not peace as the world gives. Many people yearn for peace in the world's terms: cessation of conflict, whether psychological tension or

*warfare; a sense of calm or serenity of spirit. The peace that Jesus promises as he takes leave might include such things, but the peace that Jesus gives is nothing less than the consequences of the presence of God. When God is present, peace is made manifest. Communities that include a sign of the peace during worship often place it immediately following prayers of confession and absolution. When they do so, they are enacting the truth that where sin is forgiven, the new (eschatological) community of peace is a reality.”*¹ (It’s that paragraph that gave me the idea for this sermon, so I can’t take credit if you enjoy it.

Have you ever realized what he said though? We come together at a pivotal moment in our worship service. We gather for songs of praise, we hear the word of God, we listen to a reflection on those readings, and then we confess our faith. After we confess our sins in the prayers we offer up to God, asking for healing, praying for help, speaking thanksgiving to one another. And after... we are driven to those around us, making amends and reaffirming friendships. The Apostle Paul makes reference four different times in scripture to greeting one another with a “holy kiss.” We aren’t sure what all that means, but we believe that it functioned in a similar way to our sharing of peace now. When we greet one another in that trust and love, we participate in the glory that God is making evident. Once again, Geoffery’s words ring true: *“This gift of peace is bound up with all that makes for righteousness, or right relation: love, forgiveness, reconciliation, and thanksgiving.”*² When we hug, or shake hands, or wave hello, we are

¹ Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word Year C, Volume 2*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 494.

² Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word Year C, Volume 2*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 494.

doing more than simply saying hi, we share in something holy and sacred. We are given a glimpse of that Holy City that our second reading describes so beautifully; a place where God's majesty lights up the whole world, a place where only good reigns, a place of hope.

As you share the peace today, be respectful! Not everyone finds peace with hugs and touching. Be intentional! Seek out the person you haven't said hello to in a while. Welcome the stranger, embrace your loved ones, and do it all because of the joy that God is making evident in our lives. Amen.