

May 9, 2010 6th Sunday of Easter *The Source of Peace*
 Festival of the Christian Home/Mother's Day
 John 14:23-27

Peace, Jesus speaks of peace. On this Mother's Day, this day we celebrate the Festival of the Christian Home, we long for peace. This is the desire of every mother's heart, isn't it? And you need not be a mother at all to know that longing, that ache in the heart for peace. You long for peace. It is what you long for in the midst of a hectic and busy day or in the middle of a family argument. When you struggle with very important issues:

Should I choose this major?

Should I apply for this job?

Should I take this financial risk?

Should I have this surgery?

In all these choices that is your destination, isn't it? To be at peace about it once the decision is made?

Peace is surely what you want to give another when she is caught up in suffering or struggling with the reality of death. As you grasp her hand and reach out to her, you feel just as overwhelmed as she does. But you share that moment together that she might know peace in the midst of her pain.

That is your heart's deepest desire for your children: to know that you are doing and you have done the best you can and to be at peace knowing that no matter where they are or what they do they will be OK because they are in God's hands right where you have entrusted them there.

And is there any deeper longing in the heart of our nation, of the world, than for peace in the Middle East, in Afghanistan, in Iraq? As a matter of fact the original proclamation that inspired our national holiday we celebrate today was Julia Ward Howe's call to the women of the world in 1870 to unite for peace.

Arise then...women of this day!
 Arise, all women who have hearts!
 Whether your baptism be of water or of tears!

From the voice of a devastated Earth a voice goes up with
 Our own. It says: "Disarm! Disarm!
 As men have often forsaken the plough and the anvil
 At the summons of war,
 Let women now leave all that may be left of home
 For a great and earnest day of counsel.
 Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead.
 Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means
 Whereby the great human family can live in peace... <http://www.peace.ca/mothersdayproclamation.htm>

You may recognize the name “Julia Ward Howe” as the author of the Battle Hymn of the Republic. Her witness, inspired in part by the founder of Mother’s Day Anna Jarvis, was in turn a continuation of the legacy of Anna’s mother who sought to care for soldiers and unite families on both sides of the Civil War. This unique history of a longing for peace resulted in the setting of the national holiday in 1914, a holiday first celebrated at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Grafton, West Virginia in May 1907.

Yes, we long for peace.

Peace, this peace that Jesus speaks of, what is it? Is it the absence of war? Certainly those of us who hve young men and women in the military today and the residents of Iraq and Afghanistan long for this. But it is more than that. Is it contentment? Certainly it is more than a psychological state of mind, an emotion. It is much deeper than this. Is it a feeling of well-being, security, safety? It is so much more than a feeling, for feelings are so fickle and so dependent upon circumstances.

This peace is so much deeper. And it lasts.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

John 14:27

That’s it—it is peace but it is unique, different, lasting. So very much apart from what we commonly experience as peace in our culture. This peace doesn’t come from the world, from our everyday experience with the fleeting moment of this-world security. It’s peace the Bible describes like this:

Like an eagle teaching its young to fly, catching them safely on its spreading wings, the Lord kept Israel from falling.

Isaiah 49:1b

As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them along on its pinions, the LORD alone (guides us).

Deuteronomy 32:11-12a

So the Lord answers, ‘Can a woman forget her own baby and not love the child she bore?...Jerusalem, I can never forget you! I have written your name on the palms of my hands.’

Isaiah 49:15-16

As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.

Isaiah 66:13a

That’s peace!

We are so terribly human though, aren’t we? Most of the time we cannot imagine ever having true peace until that diploma is actually in our hands, or

you are actually hired for that job, or that financial risk pays off, or the surgery is over and done with and successful, or your loved one doesn't die after all, or the war is over. It is so hard for us to know peace when so many things in life are so incomplete, uncertain, and unpredictable. Is there any way at all to have peace now, in the midst of all this mystery that is life?

Here is where the scripture can help us. It is important to remember that Jesus imparted his peace to those from whom he was departing. He was getting ready to leave them. Now, it was hard enough to experience his peace when they were with him everyday, when he was right beside them, assuring them, sharing the truth, making a difference in people's lives all around them. But now he is telling them goodbye and there are signs all around that he may well be going to his death. They fear when they lose him they will lose his peace, too. That's when Jesus tells them:

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 and do not let them be afraid

John 14:27

Their fear, like ours, is that there will be no peace if he is not with them in body and flesh. Our fear, like theirs, is that we can only know peace on our own terms, only when we somehow avoid life's challenges and struggles and tragedies. We cannot imagine having any peace when so much about life is unknown. They cannot imagine having any peace at all if he dies. But he does. He does. And the peace he promises them comes at his resurrection.

During my moments of prayer or during the day when I try to keep aware of God's presence there is one image that works well for me. It is the image of me resting in the arms of God. There is something about that image that keeps me centered on what I am about. And that is first and foremost to just let God love me. Since my mother's death fourteen years ago that helpful image has taken on a new awareness for me. It just seems very natural to me to understand, perceive, and receive God's love through her qualities.

And there is no other way to really describe what overtakes and enfolds me in those moments than peace. God is surely the source of peace. For so many of us our first awareness of the love of God is experienced in our mother's love. Long before we are ever able to understand and know who God is we experience God's love in the love of mother. You see, we learn very, very early indeed what is ultimately important in life. That is, the meeting of basic needs for comfort, security, safety, and provision which mother provides.

Peace, safety, security. Everything is OK. Lasting peace. God is the source. It is no mistake that scripture makes reference after reference to God as a mother, for it is in that primary relationship of mother and child that so very much of our early awareness of the true source of meaning in life arises.

As a child lies quietly in its mother's arms, so my heart is quiet within me. Israel, trust in the Lord now and forever. Psalm 131:2b-3

You will be carried like a child that is nursed by its mother, carried in her arms and treated with love. I will comfort you in Jerusalem as a mother comforts her child. Isaiah 66:12b-13a

Yes, this peace is so much more than the absence of war, or a psychological state of mind, or even a feeling of well-being. It has to be more because Jesus does more than counsel peace, he gives it. And he gives it in the face of his own death. When Jesus shares these words with his disciples he is about to leave them. They are afraid and fearful of being left alone. Just like us, tentatively clinging to whatever peace the world can give, hanging on for dear life, trying to make as much peace as we possibly can. But is it not just like God to give us just what we need just when we need it?

Jesus gives peace. It is a gift of God. And it is a gift for you, now. That makes all the difference. It is a gift granted freely to those who need it most. It is a gift made available to all of you that you might share it with others.

That's the only way you can face decisions about majors and jobs and financial risk and surgery with any confidence at all. That's what you're doing when you grasp the hand of one caught up in suffering or facing the reality of death. This is the true source of your love and care for your children to which you always entrust them. This is the steadfast witness to the nations that will bring all war to an end. Though you sometimes tremble at the risk with your decisions or fear the tears of the one whose hand you hold might shatter your own fragile being or cry that the nations will never hear the call to peace there is good news here. The good news is that God gives peace in that moment. In that vulnerable, trusting moment, when you don't know what else to do, when there is nowhere else to turn, peace begins to make its way into a heart, into a world, a peace that flows from God through you.

Peace. You long for peace. Thanks be to God who grants us peace through Jesus Christ our Lord.

William G. Davidson