



The presence which breathes peace

John 14:23-29

In this Easter period and in preparation for Pentecost, we look over our shoulder to the teaching ministry of Jesus. Our scripture reading (John 14:23-29) comes as part of Jesus' farewell address to the disciples. Interestingly, it comes as a reply to a question by one of the disciples: "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" (v.22) The response of Jesus is that those who keep his commands will also love him. In this relationship, God will come and make a home with them. This promise of the Spirit is essential to living out the Christian life.

A Christian never outgrows the need for the Holy Spirit. As the Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch said in 2007, "Without the Spirit, God is far away, Christ belongs to the past, the Gospel is a dead letter, the Church is a mere organisation; authority takes the form of domination, mission is turned into propaganda, worship is reduced to bare recollection, Christian action becomes the morality of a slave. But when the Spirit of God is near, the risen Christ is present with us, here and now, the gospel is the power of life ..."

The new age of the Spirit is brought about through an outpouring which will not only empower Christians, but also enable them to live within the peace of God.

Jesus would soon leave the disciples, but his leaving is not an unmitigated disaster. Jesus promises that though he will return to the Father, he will send a companion to be with us forever. The Holy Spirit is referred to as "The Advocate" who continues to plead for us, to represent us to God and speak for us in ways better than our ways. This concept has a rather obvious understanding in the legal world.

The Advocate is also depicted as a teacher of the whole truth of the gospel, described by John as being sent in God's name, and "will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (v.26) This reminds all of us that we are not expected to be Christians by ourselves; we have been given an Advocate who will stand up for us, which is greatly reassuring. The departure of Jesus will benefit the disciples in many ways, but chiefly in granting them a peace that will make all the difference.

Austin Farrer concluded, "The gift of the Holy Spirit closes the last gap between the life of God and ours. When we allow the love of God to move in us, we can no longer distinguish ours and his; he becomes us as he lives in us."

This gift of peace will equip these earliest disciples, empower them and excite them for the future. He will:-

- Equip us with assurance about the future
- Empower us in difficult days
- Excite us in our future mission

Text: John 14:27 -
"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."

The gift of peace will equip us with assurance about the future



Jesus' presence with us from this moment on will be different. Clearly, it has something to do with our future destiny in Christ. (Refer to v.v.2-6) Jesus Christ is now in his eternal place, beyond our simple understanding.

As Bruce Milne put it, "The hope of life beyond the grave is rooted in the most certain of realities, the veracity and trustworthiness of Jesus Christ."

- Jesus will not forget us as he leaves
- He will return one day to this world
- The gift of eternal life is possible as he goes away

We have become uncertain about the future. Even in a city like ours, we are increasingly concerned about the drive-by shootings, the growing level of city homelessness and the prevalence of family poverty, leaving children deeply affected. In this area, we have to speak up because none of these matters will become the major issues in the forthcoming Federal election.

There is unquestionably an absence of healthy authority in our twenty-first century western world. Into such a vacuum enter many unhealthy expressions of extremist thought, claiming allegiance from people who are often ill-equipped to consider the full implications of what is at stake.

The gift of God's peace gives a healthy perspective on the future.

I have just published a blog on the theme of mentoring and referred to the fact that if it were not for those who helped to mentor me in critical teenage years, I don't know where I'd be.

The peace of God is the great mentor in our lives, who guides us in his ways and leads us into all truth.

Mentoring is the most personal style of helping people to maturity. The person offering the mentoring discovers the needs of the person he or she is helping and makes vital connections. God's Spirit does just this alongside and within us.

Dwight L Moody was very direct, yet often painfully accurate. He once observed, "The Spirit of God first imparts love; he next inspires hope, and then gives liberty; and that is about the last thing we have in many of our churches."

We are called to embrace a vision of the future and, as Christian people, recognise One who comes alongside us with strength and encouragement. This naturally leads us to see just what this peace will do for us when times are far from easy, as will soon be the disciples' experience.

The gift of peace will empower us in difficult days

This gift of peace is not merely the absence of trouble. Christians in every age have found that the gift of God can bring much trouble, agitation and outright opposition. One commentator said, "It means everything which makes for our highest good." This may in turn require:-

- Standing firm against strong enemies of truth



- Holding to an unbroken relationship with God
- Discovering a pattern of courageous living

Peace is our greatest weapon ... not one of aggression but one of power. Jesus was concerned about how the disciples would tackle what lay ahead of them. As the time for the crucifixion drew near, there would be limited opportunity for Jesus to speak to the disciples and so these passages in John 14-17 give us an insight into his preparation of them for all that lies ahead.

It is easy enough for us to think of faith when we are not under pressure, locked into a religious vacuum of safety.

In the first century, the “pax Romana” was widely heralded, but it was a peace won and maintained by the brutal force of the sword. It typified the peace the world gives, but the peace that will empower us in difficult days comes as Jesus departs and offers his life-giving presence.

Jesus Christ does not promise us peace at every corner, but invites us into a relationship which will transform all of our life in its various aspects. We cannot avoid the fact that the power of our Christian living flows from the vitality of our relationship with God.

Corrie ten Boom gives a wonderful picture of God abiding in us as she told this story: “I have a glove here in my hand. The glove cannot do anything by itself, but when my hand is in it, it can do many things. True, it is not the glove but my hand in the glove that acts. We are gloves. It is the Holy Spirit in us who is the hand, who does the job. We have to make room for the hand so that every finger is filled.

“The question on Pentecost is not whether God is blessing our own plans and programmes but whether we are open to the great opportunities to which his Spirit calls us.”

I often considered the history of hymns and songs. I share one of the most stirring:-

Horatio Spafford, a businessman in Chicago, sent his wife and three daughters to Europe by ship while he remained at home, intending to join them later. En route there was a terrible storm and a shipwreck, during which their three daughters drowned. Mrs Spafford made it to safety and wired back saying, “All of our daughters have been lost. Only I have been saved.”

He took the next vessel. As they came near the place where his daughters drowned, the skipper of the ship pointed to the place where the other ship had gone down. It was there on the deck of the ship he wrote these stirring words:

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
“It is well, it is well with my soul.”

One advice columnist who dealt with thousands of letters a month was asked what was the most common topic. She said that most people seemed to be afraid of something. It could be health, losing employment or relating to family responsibilities. Many are even



afraid when there is no reason to be frightened. Ours is a world of fearful people. We are granted a peace that draws us out of fear.

The gift of peace will excite us in our future mission

The disciples were confronted with the challenge of mission in the world. Let me return to the word “parakletos” which we translate “paraclete”. It has its legal context and is used in that sense in 1 John 2:1, but here it refers to one who is “called alongside to help”. Various words are associated with it in the New Testament such as exhort, comfort, entreat and encourage.

- If we are to serve God, then we will share in a great vision beyond ourselves
- If we are to work for God, then our resources will not be sufficient of themselves
- If we are to be partners in God’s kingdom, we cannot go it alone

An intrinsic part of the nature of Christian community is that we are knit together in a wonderful sense of united purpose.

Jesus could foresee some trying times ahead for his disciples and he gives them the peace of his presence. This gift may not always still the storms of life, but it will give us the confidence and strength to keep to our course in spite of the storms.

The gift of peace is the legacy that God’s love offers to us. When I think of the concept of legacy, I am conscious:-

- Some leave a legacy of hurt and bitterness
- Some are totally wrapped up in material matters
- Jesus Christ offers to us a legacy of love and peace

Few things are more sought after than peace.

In the serial movie War and Remembrance, the death camp scenes are particularly heartrending. In one spot, a mother and child are being ushered into the bathhouse, which is really a gas chamber. The child is crying loudly, visibly upset. The mother is trying to comfort her child as she spies a flowering tree. She goes over to the tree and plucks a blossom to hand to her daughter. This effort seems to work. Forgetful of her own fate, she thinks only of her child. That’s love and the only quality that will bring peace.

The Tablet newspaper told the story of Father Paolo Turturro, a parish priest in Palermo, who launched a children’s competition for a poem or painting dedicated to peace. There were 120,000 entries, including some from outside Sicily. The winner was a poem entitled “Painting Peace”:

I had a box of colours.
There was no red for the blood of my wounds.
There was no black to paint the mourning of my loved ones.
I didn’t have yellow for the world’s jealousies.
I had blue:
I sat and painted Peace.

Turturro used the title “Painting Peace” for an organisation he founded to help the youths of Palermo and keep them out of the hands of the Mafia.



Jesus gave a legacy of peace. In 1520 Ferdinand Magellan battled for an entire year to find a passage around South America. There, at the very tip of the continent, in its icy waters, he encountered some of the worst weather anywhere on earth. Raging seas, towering ice floes, and a mutinous crew plagued his efforts. When he finally made his way through those straits (which today bear his name – the Straits of Magellan), he entered into the great body of water that lay beyond, and as he and his men lifted their faces to heaven and gave thanks to God, he named the new ocean “The Peaceful One” – the Pacific Ocean.

The Holy Spirit is the agent of God’s kingdom and the bearer of God’s peace for our lives. Life in the Spirit of God is a life beyond our control. We live in a world that has come to the conclusion that human beings have reached the point where the only power that matters is self-control. When the Holy Spirit of God enters our lives, we are seized, guided and belong to God. That is our real hope.