

Peace I leave with you ...

... My peace I give you

A sermon given on the Sixth Sunday of Easter, 14th May 2023 – by Revd Canon Peter Wadsworth, in Beverley Minster

John 14:15-21

Sometimes the readings that we get on a Sunday morning are nice, neat little chunks that sort of speak for themselves and stand out alone. On other occasions, sadly, we do get what could be said to be rather truncated bits of something much longer and it's quite difficult just to read the bit that we get on Sunday without the rest. And never is that more true than the 14th chapter of St. John's Gospel. So if you have an opportunity to go home, pick up your Bible and read the whole of that chapter, I would commend it to you. It's a chapter which is about reassurance. This is Jesus speaking to his disciples before his own death, but looking beyond that death and his resurrection to a time when the work of spreading the good news will fall upon the disciples; a time which will be the time of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God from Father and Son to enable them to operate in the world. But before that responsibility falls upon them, Jesus really spends the whole of this chapter reassuring them.

And perhaps that's part of the reason why parts of it at least crop up so often, as it did in my case when we had to preach at funerals. It begins with the words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." It then goes on to those famous words about, "In my Father's house there are many mansions" - many rooms in the new translation and reassuring them that Jesus goes on ahead to prepare a place for them. And then it's full of reassurance as well that if you have seen and experience Christ, then you have known the Father, you have known God. Now that is a very important point to make, particularly in the Jewish context where throughout the Old Testament, the idea that if you ever saw God, it would be so terrible, so majestic, so magnificent that you wouldn't survive. But Jesus is saying now, those of you have seen and known me, have seen and known the Father.

And then we have this morning's passage, "*I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to be with you forever.*" And in fact that word advocate - it comes up in different translations in different parts of the Bible - so sometimes it's the comforter; sometimes it's the counsellor; sometimes it's advocate. But it is the idea of constant companionship and support, because a great deal is going to be asked of these disciples: as we know, they will go out into the world and they will meet opposition; will meet

imprisonment; some of them will meet death - but they will not do it alone - they will do it with the Spirit of God within them.

And also, and here's a very important sentence for us - Jesus is not just speaking to this select little group that surrounds him in his earthly life. He says, *"They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."* That is addressed to us, to all of us, to all who have over the centuries come to Christ, worshipped him and sought to serve him.

He also speaks in this chapter, of the Spirit making a home in them. Now, there's a slight emphasis in the Greek which doesn't quite come out in English: the idea of making a home with somebody is something permanent. This is not just a chance visitor, a passing person who pops in, maybe from time to time. No, says Jesus, through my Spirit I will dwell with you; I will be at home with you always and forever. That is what it's all about.

And then in the rest of the chapter, it has those lovely words, *"Peace I leave you; my peace I give to you; a peace such as the world cannot give."* And I sometimes, when I use it at funerals, I used to say to people, 'What do you think that peace is? What is the peace that God can give that the world cannot?' Well, it's a peace that sees us through hard times; it's a peace which gives us an inner strength, even when we are facing difficult things; or even when we are confronted with the continuing struggles of the world. That's a peace that lasts. It's a peace too, that transcends this life. Jesus says, *"When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself."* This is not something for this life only - a peace which, if you like, might start running out the older we get and fear what comes after. No, the peace which Christ gives is the peace and reassurance that this world, this life, is only part of a greater reality of which we also are part.

So I commend to you the whole of John 14, a chapter which reassures us, strengthens us as we seek to live out our Christian lives. But there's something that needs to be said again, and firmly: it's not peace in the sense of a quiet life; a cocoon; a bubble in which we can live without trouble, without cost. No, the peace which Jesus promises, the Spirit which he promises is for us to be in the world, active in his service, confronting all that is difficult and dangerous and broken in our world.

I spoke at the beginning of the service in the notices, about Christian Aid week. If we are to be true Christians, it has to be a peace that leads us into action, a peace from which we draw strength to be in the world, serving our Lord.

Reading Text

John 14:15-21

¹⁵ 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. ¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. ¹⁸ 'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹ In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'