

May 25th message

Today's gospel reading is short and sweet, yet it is filled with themes that be preached about for hours. First we have Jesus words about love. Essentially they say if one has love for Him, then your lives will be filled with the type of love that truly cares for others. This type of love will become so familiar; it will be at home with such a person. Some Bibles say, 'make our abode with him.'

As I thought about this it occurred to me how we all like our homes. Home is a place that is familiar and safe for us. Medical research has also discovered this and while there are exceptions most research indicates, home is the best place to get better. This is because a familiar and supportive environment can aid in recovery and well-being. There is the emotional comfort of a familiar place and people. The sense of safety and security a home provides also helps foster healing. Jesus makes the point of how following His example of love brings a peace that others cannot understand.

This leads into some other thoughts, leading up to a verse I often use at a celebration of life when I meet with a family. "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."

After the death of a loved one some can be completely lost and dishearten. But those who believe and have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior have internalized the promises Christ has said. While there is always some sadness at a passing, we have the peace Christ offers. We have the promise of eternal life. This is something non-believers don't understand. So let's have a look at this type of peace.

I've told you before how I watch a few of those gold shows on the discovery channel on Friday night. Actually I record them and fast forward through all the commercials. It's interesting to see how they approach their jobs and the challenges they face. Some approach it as a way of making a living, much like any other job with the risks and uncertainty, much like farming.

But many approach it like they are playing the lottery. They are sure there is gold in certain places and go to much trouble risking their health, savings and even their lives to find what they call, “life changing gold.” Yet if and when they find it, it’s never, and I repeat it’s never enough. While I know most of these shows are scripted and edited, it is an example of a peace the world cannot give. By the world, I mean our culture or society or conventional wisdom. I know this is an extreme example, but let’s look at a few more.

Not so long ago, many would tell how young people would be so much better off with a college degree. Many of these folks did not take into account that college is not for everyone. They would site how one’s income on the average would be so much better. Many listened to this worldly advice and sought the inner peace a higher income might provide. Then countless found that their degree would not provide a good wage and were saddled with student loan debt. Fortunately conventional wisdom has shifted a bit and trades schools are being promoted.

While I’m not looking for them, I’m seeing more and more advertisements for anti-aging supplements. The wording usually goes something like this: Begin Your Journey to Living a Longer, Healthier, and More Enriched Life. We have bridged the gap between nature and science. We have developed premium, science-backed anti-aging supplements catering to the discerning individual who values a quality of life. These advertisements infer if bodies are healthy, souls are healthy. While we all know the benefits of healthy living and exercise I think one can see the problem here. Healthy living does not necessarily mean a healthy soul.

And finally let’s look at one more and I have to warn you this one might step on a few toes. The world says that technology is the answer to much that troubles us. It teaches that one’s life will be better if one has more devices.

I had to give this one a lot of thought. As you know, I’m slow to embrace technology, but once I get used to something I see the benefits. There has always been a desire out there to have the newest and latest whatever, whether it be a car, house, piece of equipment, tool, or anything that might make one’s life easier.

But one has to temper that with reality and question how it will affect one's life. Often times the newest and latest has its flaws and disappointments. Just trying to figure out something new can lead to much aggravation and stress. Technology is great when it works, but as we all know you better have a plan B.

So like so much the world offers one has to ask, does it provide an inner peace that is better than what Jesus has?

Many would say yes because the peace of Christ is hard to explain. What the world offers is tangible, yet it does not last. It is a peace that does well when the sun is shining and panics when the storms come crashing. It's a fragile peace, a type of false security that depends on our environment, our achievements and our ability to control situations. It can be a sense of calm that can quickly turn into anxiety when things don't go as planned. It has been said the world's peace is the peace of a dormant volcano.

Whether we realize it or not we are highly influenced by many things. There are many ways our culture does its best to influence us in the shows we watch and the advertising that is all around us. I read this week of an advertisement way back in 1921 that really helped sell a lot of soap. Many of these old ads would never fly today but the corporate world still relies on emotion to sell many of their products. This ad from over 100 years ago made Palmolive soap a household name. Would your husband marry you again? Why of course he would if you use our soap!

So how are we to know and share the inner peace our Lord offers? Fortunately we are not on our own. Jesus tells how we have the Holy Spirit with us. Some Bibles refer to the Spirit as a helper, an advocate, and still others a counselor. We all know the value of such people.

I understand there once was a guy who went to a marriage counselor after his wife had been there. The therapist said to him, "Your wife has complained that you never buy her flowers, what have you to say about that?" The man thought for

a minute and said in a sincere voice, “I honestly had no idea my wife even sold flowers.”

When I was a teacher, we had IEP meetings. IEP stands for Individualized Education Program. This was new to many parents so some would come to these meetings on their child with an advocate. These folks usually had been through the process and knew what to look for and advocate on behalf of the child. Their support was quite helpful for a parent attending such a meeting. They knew the questions to ask and what could be offered to help a child do better.

We have the same in the Holy Spirit. There is no deep theological mystery in how the Spirit will work in our lives. Verse 26 says it quite plainly, “the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you.”

If we think about it, all of us probably recognize the work of the Spirit in our lives. For me, it’s a constant nudging that I should be more faithful and doing more for the kingdom. It’s that reminder that I’m not following the Lord’s teaching when I am tempted to do or say something wrong. Perhaps you can relate. It’s also a reminder that there is always more to learn and share, even when I think there is nothing new to preach about on Sunday. And I’ve also learned that as a follower of Christ there is always a new way to apply our faith to an ever changing world. I can think of many examples of this. We can look at how our world has changed over the past few decades and the many needs that are coming to light now. Not only are there many issues in the world that need our attention but there are many needs here in our area for what the gospel teaches about serving one another.

The Spirit will teach us and remind us of these things through our study of the word, prayer, fellowship with one another, and our worship together.

Our Corinthians reading sheds light on this. Those who believe in Christ’s death and resurrection and have put their faith in Him have the thoughts and words of the Spirit available to them.

So no matter what our situation in life the peace of God which passes all understanding is available to us.

Our final hymn, "Peace like a River," has an interesting history. We find the words in Isaiah 66:12, "For this is what the Lord says: I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees."

Today there are many different versions of this song. The one we are about to sing is an African-American spiritual. As you may or may not know, Spirituals began on the fields and the slaves would sing to pass the time of day. It was also a great way to pass messages along and share the gospel in such an oppressive environment. Along it has been known and sung for centuries, what surprised me was this hymn wasn't published in a hymnal until 50 years ago. So if one looks at the history of this spiritual in the oppression of slavery and one begins to understand how this peace offered by God is a deep, abiding peace that comes from knowing we are loved and secure in God's hands. It is relational peace, the kind of serenity that comes from one's relationship with Christ. May we always know this peace of God. Amen.