

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

May 22, 2022



PEACE

a moment or permanent state?

by Drew Downs

Jesus offers us peace. But what does that mean? And what do we *think* it means?

Often we think of peace as a break from all of the things. A moment. Like a disruption. But ultimately, not something that lasts. Inevitably war will break out again.

We also seem to want peace to be an ongoing permanent state of being. A peace that lasts forever.

The first vision is pessimistic and the other is optimistic. But neither reflects an offer of assistance, joy, or new life.

Peace is also restoration, wholeness, justice, and stillness. It is active and represents a positive impact on our environment. And as peace-makers, we are bringing this broad sense of peace to every interaction and situation. So, in a very real sense, if there is to be peace, let it begin with us.

EASTER

Spring 2022

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

This Sunday marks a special ecumenical moment for St. Stephen's! We are hosting the Highpoint Youth Group's Youth Sunday at our 10:00 service.

Youth from St. Stephen's will be joining with youth from Central Presbyterian, Centenary United Methodist, and Unity Presbyterian to lead our regular worship. They will preside, read the lesson, lead the music, and preach!

What is most exciting for me is that we should see this as ***normal***.

In our tradition the role of leading worship is extended to everyone. There is nothing which *prevents it*. But we also love our structure and our *orders*. So, out of habit and a sense of *stability*, we get used to the priest leading worship...pretty much all of the time.

But the primary role of the priest is *sacramental*. Pretty much the only thing I'm allowed to do that others can't is the Eucharist. And even that, it is precisely the blessing of the elements. That's really it.

However, for the sake of *consistency* and *skilled execution*, we all appreciate that we can rely on "the one with the collar" to do it. But this isn't the only way.

I'm delighted to share the lead with these talented youth and encourage us all to be mindful of our own skill and opportunity to lead.

With love,
Drew

EASTER

Spring 2022

FOR SUNDAY

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 22, 2022

Collect

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

From John 14:23-29

"I do not give to you as the world gives."

Reflection

Jesus is leaving. He tells them he's going to hit the road. But they shouldn't worry, because the Spirit is coming. Promise.

For us, this is awesome news. We are down for the Spirit showing up and making her presence known! But for those in the room, around that table, eating the last supper with Jesus, it doesn't strike me that this would be all that comforting. When your loved one is leaving, no amount of "I got you this going away present" is going to really comfort you.

In this way, the line "I do not give to you as the world gives" is all the more striking. He is giving us something, but we must change *our expectations* about it.

EASTER

There is a temptation to see this as a throw-away line. That Jesus is saying "I'm actually something of a gift-giver myself." Or to see it as one-and-done. He literally meant "there was no Holy Spirit before and *he* will give it to the world because he's Jesus and super awesome like that."

But let's be honest with ourselves, these responses serve only to *explain* rather than uncover. They seek to deal with our discomfort more than reveal Jesus.

The much more fulfilling way to approach this is as *continuously* relevant. To name the idea that Jesus gives differently than the world. And this has two major implications: 1) Our expectation of *receiving* is based on our experience of *the world*. So therefore 2) *We* give differently than he does *and* we anticipate he'll give like *us*.

And what is "the world" exactly? Jesus is vague, but we can comfortably assume he's talking about the dominant cultures, the people, and the present order of things.

So how does the world give, then?
And how does Jesus give?

These are the twin million dollar questions. And I can't offer an answer with 100% confidence. But I have a solid 80-85% that we can base it on what Jesus has just said.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."

We give with an expectation of reciprocity. We give *in order to receive*. Good things we give to get good back. Bad things we give *as a response to what we have received*. So we punish and reject. Or reward and consume.

Jesus seems to be saying *My giving is different. It is sacrificial. Free. And based entirely in love. And you are free to take it. Use it. And, if warranted, share it.*

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