

When we use the word "peace" we often think of calmness, tranquility, the lack of fighting. There are different ways to achieve such a condition. For example, a graveyard is quite peaceful in its own way. Even though there are many people in close proximity, there is little fighting. There is also little love, little joy, but there is a kind of stillness and calmness.

Another way calmness can be achieved is through the establishment of such severe law and order that everyone becomes too scared to step out of line. Totalitarian governments come up with punishments and displays of power that intimidate the people they rule over. Almost all of the great empires of history have used these tactics.

The Roman government, for example, once crushed a slave revolt and sent a powerful message afterwards. They crucified 6,000 captured slaves along the Appian Way. For 120 miles one person after another hung there dead on crosses. The message was clear: Don't mess with those in power. It worked. People were frightened. There was a kind of peace.

This is one way you could understand the events of Holy Week that we have entered into today with Palm Sunday. The Jewish leaders wanted a kind of peace. Jesus had been disturbing their peace. So they solved a problem. Jesus had been getting too popular. He had raised Lazarus from the dead. Upon entering Jerusalem he went to the temple and made quite a scene. He flipped over tables and let animals loose. The Jewish leaders wanted to know who had given him such authority.

Jesus was obviously out of control. He needed to be dealt with. The usual measures of getting dirt on someone wouldn't work with him. Nor could they turn the people against him. The people loved him more than they loved the Jewish leaders. There was only one sensible course to take, and they took it. They arrested him in the middle of the night. They immediately convicted him in their kangaroo court. They applied pressure to Pontius Pilate. By the time the people of Jerusalem were hardly finished with their breakfast Jesus was already nailed to the cross! It was already too late. Efficiency like that would make any dictator tip his beret with respect.

For some of us, though, this kind of thing really makes our blood boil. It was so unjust! The leaders were supposed to be the best of the people, but in fact they were the worst. They were vain. They were vindictive. They were cowards. They purposely engaged Jesus in an unfair fight. They didn't dispute with him in the open. It was all arranged behind closed doors. Their dirty deeds were done with the cover of darkness. Some of us might like to take our clubs and swords and give them a taste of their own medicine.

This might have been how Peter felt. We've been studying Peter in our Adult Bible Study. When the Jewish leaders came to arrest Jesus in the middle of the night, Peter took out his sword and cut off the right ear of the high priest's servant. I can't help it: a part of me says, "Hurray for Peter!" At least one of those scoundrels felt a little pain! But that sets me at odds with Jesus himself.

Perhaps you remember how Jesus rebuked Peter. He told him to put away his sword. He said, "**Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me to drink?**" He also said, "**All who take the sword shall perish by the sword.**"

Indeed, that is how it goes. History tells this story over and over. The story goes like this: The oppressors oppress until those they oppress rise up and take away their power. But without fail, those who were formerly oppressed, when it's their turn, also oppress whomever they can take advantage of. They, then, become the target until one day a knife is found sticking out of their backs. The situation is always unstable because hatred is just below the surface. Power is maintained only with the utmost vigilance. Knowing that they hate you, you must strike first, before they strike you. It's kill or be killed. **"Whoever takes the sword, perishes by the sword."**

The best peace to be hoped for is the peace of the graveyard. If all goes well you eliminate your opponents before they eliminate you. Then you live happily ever after. That was the Jewish leaders' theory of peace, and they dealt with Jesus accordingly.

However, this theory did not originate with them. It is much older. It goes back all the way to the mists of the earliest recorded history. The first human being born in the natural way was named Cain. He had a brother named Abel. One day Cain became annoyed with his brother Abel. Abel was disturbing his peace. So Cain bashed his head in, and reestablished the peace. Problem solved. No more Abel; no more annoyance. He lived happily ever after... Except he didn't. Maybe you remember the story. He thought that he would live happily ever after, but in fact he was haunted for the rest of his life by the dirty deeds he did in secret. This is some kind of peace, but it leaves much to be desired.

Is there another kind of peace? Most do not believe so. Jesus says, **"Broad is the gate and easy is the way that leads to destruction, and many enter thereby. Narrow is the gate and hard is the way that leads to eternal life, and few there are who find it."** Most people believe what simply comes naturally to all of us: We will be better off if we are in control. We will be richer if we take what someone else has. We will be happier if we eliminate those who annoy us. Kill or be killed. This world is made up of winners and losers. See to it that you are like the Jewish leaders, who obviously won, instead of like Jesus, who obviously lost.

But did he? That is the question! This is why the resurrection is so important. If Jesus rose from the dead, then he was right and his ways are best. If he did not rise from the dead, then the Jewish leaders were right. The message would be: Let no scruples get in the way of your ambitions. If Abel didn't want to get killed, he should have killed Cain before Cain killed him. If Jesus didn't want to get arrested and killed, he should have dismissed Judas long ago, armed his supporters, and stormed the chief priest's palace. The strategy is not hard to understand. Do whatever is beneficial to you, and don't do whatever might be beneficial to others.

What is hard to understand and to learn is Jesus's peace. To learn Jesus's peace you have to change your mind, which is what the word "repent" means. You have to think so differently that the Bible speaks of this change as being born again, or that we must be crucified with Christ and raised with him. So much must change that it is beyond our powers. Faith is a miracle worked by the Holy Spirit. But what comes at the end is worth it. What comes at the end is peace.

Jesus spoke about this peace in those chapters in John that we talked about during our midweek series. Jesus said, **"In me you have peace. In the world you will have trouble, but take heart: I have overcome**

the world." Again, Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." Those are words of quiet confidence. Although he knows that death is but hours away, he is not like a drowning rat, desperate to survive. Jesus said, "You trust in God. Trust also in me."

Trust in Jesus because his resurrection happened. The resurrection and judgment that is coming at the end of this world is real too. This is what all those who live only for their own ambitions deliberately ignore. The resurrection is coming! When that happens, those who appeared to have won will lose. Those who appeared to have lost will win. "The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. There is nothing that is secret that won't be revealed, and there is nothing that is hidden that won't be exposed." These are clear teachings of Jesus.

Now if you are like me, then you probably have your own dirty deeds done in darkness, the exposure of which would bring about intense embarrassment or perhaps even fear. To you I say, "Do not be afraid so long as your peace is in Jesus." Your peace in Jesus will be stronger than your sins. Jesus's righteousness speaks louder than our failings.

But don't go on thinking that your dirty deeds of darkness will get you ahead in life. They won't. They harm you; they don't bless you. Even if you managed to gain the whole world by unrighteousness, the time would come when you would regret it—even if you somehow managed to make it into heaven. Change your mind; change your ways. Light, truth, life, and all other good things come from Jesus. Repent and believe the good news that Jesus has overcome the world, and his peace will reign forever and ever!

