

**Peace**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**July 3, 2022**

Grace and peace to you from God, our Creator and Sustainer, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit that abides in each of us.

Last week, Jill and I rented a house in Florida and all of our kids and grandkids met us there for the week. Most of the week we just went to the beach or played in the pool up at the house. When we left, the kids all got on airplanes while Jill and I drove back to KC. It is a 15-hour drive from Destin, so we stopped about halfway and stayed overnight, before making the final drive home. Before we left the hotel that morning, Jill noted at breakfast that she kept smiling at people, but nobody was smiling back, and that made her feel uncomfortable. After she made me aware of it, I noticed it, too. Then we went to check out and the person at the desk didn't smile, either. She politely asked how our stay was, but then she smiled and said, "Have a great day." Finally, we received a smile back, and it made us feel good.

Mother Teresa spoke often about the importance of smiling. In fact, she once said, "Let us not use bombs and guns to overcome the world. Let us use love and compassion. Peace begins with a smile. Smile five times a day at someone you don't really want to smile at; do it for peace. Let us radiate the peace of God and so light His light and extinguish in the world and in the hearts of all men all hatred and love for power." Mother Teresa proclaimed that to have real peace we need to start with a smile, and she also proclaimed that peace begins with us. In other words, if we are going to achieve real peace in this world, then we must start by offering peace in our own lives, and that peace can start with something as simple as a smile.

Tomorrow, this country will celebrate the 246<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. All weekend, people have been celebrating with fireworks, concerts, parades, and gatherings with family and friends. Don't we usually proclaim that, as a

nation, we are the light of this world? We are the beacons of freedom and peace. Personally, I think we can be that, but not because we have the biggest army, or the most money, or the best political system. No, we can be a nation of peace if we each tangibly find ways to offer peace, as Christ has taught us.

In our gospel story today, Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs to offer peace, “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’” (Luke 10:5). It is easy to think world peace is beyond our abilities, but as I read this story, I hear Jesus saying something like *if you want peace, it begins with one house at a time, so offer my peace to all you encounter*. We have Christ’s peace. Before Jesus died, as he was preparing his disciples for his departure, he said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives” (John 14:27). And remember the story from that first Easter evening? Jesus’ first words to his disciples when he appeared to them was, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19). Jesus gave us his peace, and now we are called to share it, but it is also important to note that we can only offer it. We cannot make others accept it. “If anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you” (Luke 10:6).

Did you ever wonder why we offer the peace in worship? I know over the years I have had many come to me and say, *Pastor, I don’t like offering the peace. I am not comfortable walking around shaking peoples’ hands. Why can’t we skip that part?* Well, we have it in our liturgy because it is a way of reminding us that we are to offer Christ’s peace and, in doing so, we then come to this table filled with peace. If we can’t offer peace with those with whom we worship, how will we ever do it in the world?

Imagine if we saw this as a way of practicing what it is Christ has called us to do and then we all went out and offered that peace every day to this broken and violent world. Yes, I said, *What if we actually did what we do in church out in the world.* There's a novel idea! How do we do this, you might ask? Well, you could do as Mother Teresa suggests, and that is simply smile at others, even if they don't smile back. Mother Teresa also said doing acts of charity was a way of offering Christ's peace. So, maybe we can do more acts of charity. Personally, in every email or note I write, and I write many every day, I end my note by saying, "Shalom," which is a Hebrew word for "peace." In fact, over the years, I have had many congregants begin to offer peace this same way.

But keep in mind that Jesus has warned us that not everyone will accept our offering of peace. In fact, he noted, "See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves" (Luke 10:3). What do wolves do with sheep? Yes, they eat them. We are the food this world needs and sometimes we will get eaten, but we also need to remember that Jesus has promised to be our shepherd, and shepherds protect their flocks from the wolves. It can be dangerous to always try and be the one offering peace, but we have the great shepherd to protect us, so offer away and do it boldly. Last week in that hotel, many people that morning didn't accept our smiles, but one did, and that made it all worthwhile. When our offer of peace isn't accepted, Jesus says, *Don't stop, just move on and offer it somewhere else.*

Now, I know I have made this sound very simple, but imagine if we Christians took seriously this call to offer peace. Imagine if stopped arguing over which style of worship was best, or whose dogma was right, or who should be allowed in and who should not be allowed in the church and instead took this call to offer peace seriously. Wouldn't the world be a different

place? Would the world see the church differently and more positively if we saw ourselves as a peace offering instead of a place of judgment and rules? Imagine how close the Kingdom of God might really be if the church, that is, you and I, offered peace daily instead of judgment and exclusivity.

So often we read the words of Jesus and we think, *It is too hard, it is impossible to do what Jesus asked, Jesus has given us too difficult of a task*, but our tasks are only difficult because we make them difficult. Mother Teresa had it right: Offering peace is as simple as offering a smile, even if we have to offer it five times a day to someone who we don't want to offer a smile. We can do that! Peace begins with us. So today when we offer peace, remember you are practicing how to offer it in the world. When you leave here today and you go to celebrate the birthday of this great nation, I hope you celebrate by finding ways to offer peace, Christ's peace, and may you do it with a smile.

May the peace of Christ be with you always! Amen.