

This week my friend in Duluth joyfully reported that summer is finally coming to northern Minnesota. I told her that all the rain showers here have been reminding me of our summers at camp when it always seemed it was about to rain or it had just rained, unless of course it was raining. Perhaps it was that nostalgia that had me singing *Peace I leave with you*, what we used to sing at the end of camp, while I studied our gospel this week. Nowadays, cell phones and social media let us stay connected to communities that in the past would have been temporary, like our camp groups used to be. So I imagine closing campfires now don't feel quite as final as they did 20 or 30 years ago when we would tearfully sing *Peace I leave with you my friends; The Spirit of the Lord I send; Rejoice my brothers though I go; For I will come again*. I'm sure not all of us knew where to find those words in scripture. But when we sang those lyrics as our bittersweet goodbye, we were capturing the mood of this passage: Jesus' farewell on the night of his betrayal.

Jesus uses the last hours before his arrest to prepare the disciples for the hardships that lie immediately ahead and the life they will be called to lead once he has ascended to the Father. Two tragic things are about to happen. First, the disciples will lose their friend to an unjust, undignified, savage execution. Think about your favorite friend; as good a friend as they are, probably God incarnate was even better. The disciples are about to witness their friend's suffering and death—a preview of their own fate. But they are not only losing their friend; they are also losing their teacher. These men left their families, their homes, their livelihoods to follow Jesus; they are about to lose the leader of the movement in which they have invested their whole lives. Yet Jesus assures them that although he is going where they cannot follow, he is not leaving them alone.

Jesus promises that the Father will send the Holy Spirit to be their Advocate or Comforter or Helper, depending on the translation—the word means *called alongside*. The Spirit will teach them everything and remind them of all that Jesus has said, which is necessary considering the disciples were on a steep learning curve as they attempted to follow Jesus. They fought amongst themselves about who was the greatest; they argued with Jesus, prompting him to say “get behind me Satan”; they wanted to call down fire from heaven to obliterate people who didn't welcome them...it's good that Jesus is going to send help, because the disciples are going to need it.

We shouldn't be too hard on them: Jesus was teaching them an entirely different way of life than they'd been raised to live. They worked as fishermen, then found themselves healing diseases and casting out demons. They finally figured out that Jesus was the Son of God, then he started washing their feet? As much as Jesus tried to forewarn them about his imminent death, resurrection, and ascension, they still expected him to establish an earthly, political kingdom, where they would enjoy cabinet positions—one at his right hand and one at his left when he came into his glory. They can't envision something so different from the world they've always known.

So Jesus clarifies **My* peace I give you; I do not give to you as the world gives*. The disciples knew the peace the world claimed to give: the Roman Empire promised peace and stability, but in reality, they forced their “peace” through war; they occupied Judea and established a police state with little accountability for the soldiers’ brutality. By the time John wrote his gospel, Rome had destroyed the temple, but even when it still stood, the empire’s peace required Israel to compromise their religious practice by acknowledging Caesar as divine. Roman peace meant taxing the majority into poverty in order to pay for the elite to enjoy their golden age. The empire’s peace created client kings like Herod, puppets who exploited their own people to get wealth, power, and privilege for themselves. Roman peace rewarded the religious leaders for selling out to the government, which was how Jesus came to stand trial before Pilate over what was essentially a theological dispute. The empire’s peace meant that even when Pilate admitted Jesus was innocent, he had no qualms about sentencing Jesus to death to appease the mob. The peace *Rome* promised was the cross—a tool to terrorize the people into compliance and submission. That was what peace meant in the disciples’ world.

The world we live in still promises peace and still fails to deliver. We’re told that having the most soldiers and the deadliest weapons will bring us peace. I wonder, thinking of tomorrow’s Memorial Day, what war widows and orphans have to say about the cost of peace through military might, not to mention those who, though they physically survive deployment, suffer emotional or spiritual fatalities because of what they endured in war. We’re told that having more guns than our neighbors will bring us peace. I wonder what parents in Sandy Hook, Parkland, and so many, many other shattered communities think about that promise of peace. We’re taught that peace comes from having more—more and more for ourselves or at least more than others; so we learn to compete, as if there aren’t enough resources to go around, instead of cooperating to make sure everyone has enough. How peaceful can a life be that is one pay check, one car repair, one diagnosis away from hunger or homelessness? The world keeps promising us peace, hoping we don’t notice that it’s the ways of the world that are causing our chaos.

Still, Jesus insists: *Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid*. Jesus doesn’t say this because the world was going to change all that much; even all these years later, human progress has proved, in many ways, unimpressive. Jesus doesn’t say this because the disciples were going to take over and prevail through worldly means or by worldly measures; we can’t fix the broken system by using the methods of the broken system. But Jesus encourages the disciples, *do not be troubled, do not be afraid*, because the Spirit was coming to help them teach, preach, and practice Jesus’ countercultural peace in a world that is anything but peaceful. Following the way of Jesus, as opposed to the way of the world, means swimming against the tide; let us give thanks for the Spirit who gives us the strength to help us on our way, just as Jesus promised.