

Pentecost C 2019, June 9, 2019, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Lancaster, PA, Kurt S. Strause

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

No, the sermon is not over. Don't worry, you didn't fall asleep for the past 12 minutes and are just now waking up. I begin with these words which usually stand as a benediction to my sermons because I want to begin with Peace. But not just any peace. The Peace of God. A peace which is greater than all other human understanding. Human understanding is great, don't get me wrong. Our knowledge of the universe, the intricacies of the human body including the human mind; chemical, molecular, atomic structure of all matter; history, psychology, economics, art and music. We are an intensely, some would say infinitely, curious species. But I am today I speak of something which surpasses human knowledge and understanding. The Peace of God.

I don't believe human knowledge and understanding exists contrary to God's peace which surpasses it. In fact, I believe at the heart of our human quest for knowledge is a desire for peace. Hunger, disease, and poverty create conflicts and wars between people and nations. We seek cures for these ills in order to live in peace with one another. We create art, visual and musical, to elevate the human spirit, to bring people together into shared community, and true community is always a peaceful community. These strivings after cures and community stimulate our quest for peace among one another and they are godly pursuits. God gave human beings this great gift to strive for knowledge and to live in peaceful community.

But we are human. And our strivings are not always peaceful and the knowledge we gain is sometimes set to purposes that do not create community but rather divide. When our strivings focus merely on ourselves, and do not have their source in God they often result in destruction and not peace. The story of the Tower of Babel, which we heard in our first reading is just such an example. At the time all people spoke the same language. They proposed to build the tallest most massive skyscraper the world had ever seen. It was to be a feat of human engineering, art, and architecture. Truly a wonder of the world. But at the heart of their motivation was not to give God glory, not to build a better human community. No, they built tall and mighty, so that they could take the place of God, so they could become God. They weren't interested in peace or community, but rather usurping the place of God. And so God tore down their tower and confused their single language into many so they could no longer understand each other.

Pentecost is God's undoing of what God had done at Babel. Where Babel resulted in confusion and ultimately conflict, Pentecost restores understanding and brings Peace. True Peace. The Peace of God.

Jesus himself draws this connection between the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Peace of God. In today's gospel Jesus says, "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything...Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you." The Peace of God is Christ's peace made real and present through the promise gift of the Holy Spirit.

Yet, today we still live with the effects of Babel's confusion and our inability to understand one another. Though we have the promise of the Spirit and the peace of God, we human beings create conflict with one another, and true community evades us. Our speech is confused and at times it seems as though we speak another language. I'm not simply referring here to those who speak English being unable to understand those who speak Chinese or Swahili. Rather I speak of the ways we, in our own nation, speak at one another, past one another, using words that are not peaceful but rather divisive, demeaning, and meant to defeat the other. It's become all too obvious to say we are a highly polarized and divided country. The kind of speech most common in our land is rarely aspirational, rarely spoken to seek healing and the creation of community. It's rarely even persuasive of trying to hold out a vision that would appeal to better angels of our nature. Yes, we still live among the ruins of the Tower of Babel, rarely able to understand one another.

Pentecost's promised gift of the Holy Spirit points us beyond Babel's confusion and the division and conflict which results. The Spirit's power rests in bringing understanding where there was once confusion. The Holy Spirit breaks down the barriers which are Babel's legacy among us. The Holy Spirit brings us the Peace of God which surpasses our human ability and understanding of creating peace merely on our own. This is because the Holy Spirit comes to us from God's future. The end point of all history will be the true community of peace as all people, all people regardless of language, will gather together in a single voice of praise of God. That means everyone; Parthians **and** Medes, Republicans **and** Democrats, Capitalists **and** Socialists, Men **and** Women, Gay **and** Straight, This is God's future, this is God's peace. The Holy Spirit comes to us from that future where all is already established and begins to make it real even now.

We often refer to Pentecost as the birthday of the Church. That is true, which means the Church is the creation of the Holy Spirit. Because the church exists by the power of the Spirit that means we are to be the place which begins to model this new kind of community where barriers are broken and understanding is restored. That doesn't mean Christians won't be passionate about their politics or their views on the economy, or immigration, or climate change, or abortion, or any

number of issues we currently face. We will be passionate, and inquisitive, and curious, as we were created to be. However, we are also under the power of the Holy Spirit and that means, at the very least, that we do not use words to demean, or divide, or as weapons against one another. That's the very minimum. Rather we use Spirit filled words that seek to understand, to restore that which is broken, to build up those who are torn down.

May that peace, the Peace of God which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, peace that passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.