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[Our Summer Sermon Series this year provides us a unique opportunity to look at the
great celebrations of the Christian Church with new eyes. We can take a little different
perspective on the events because we’re not so caught up in them all. We’ve had Christmas
in June and Easter in July... Today brings another look at Pentecost... the arrival of the
Holy Spirit. This is not the normal story of the Holy Spirit that we use from the book of
Acts, with the disciples gathered in the Upper Room with tongues of fire descending upon
them.

Rather, this is the ‘prequel’ to the story of Acts, from John’s Gospel, which gives us a
different vantage point to apprehend the meaning and importance of the Holy Spirit for our
understanding and common life together...]

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no
longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you
will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.
They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those
who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to
them."
Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us,
and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word,
and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with
them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you
hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy
Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind
you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do
not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let
them be afraid.”

It is after dinner in an upper room. The disciples are reclining, leaning on each
other’s torsos, their freshly washed feet now drying off. They have had Passover
dinners before, but none like this.

Never before at Passover has a teacher removed his robe and knelt on the floor
by a basin, washing his disciples’ dusty feet, one by one.

Never before at Passover has a rabbi poured a glass of wine and said, "This is
the cup of the new covenant, poured out in my blood."

Never before at Passover has a dearly loved leader said with such calm that
someone would betray him.

What Jesus had been hinting at to his followers for 3 years now --that he would
die-- is starting to come into focus. It is no longer just a strange and confusing rumor--it is very close at hand.

The folks gathered in this upper room are a motley bunch who left everything to
follow Jesus. They were fishermen, tax collectors and carpenters, but now they are followers one and all; disciples of Jesus.

And now, he, the one they trusted with their hopes and very lives, now he is leaving them. Jesus has made it clear that he will die very soon, and I have to imagine that the disciples are caught up in the shock of the moment. Their whole lives these last years have been filled with following Jesus-- their mentor, their guide. Without him they fear they will be totally lost.

Now, although this is an extraordinary moment--this night before the first movements toward his death--it is also, strangely enough, a very common moment as well. The disciples are taking part in one of the most human experiences possible.

So often, this is what it is to live in the world, for each of us: it is to find ourselves, over and over again, on our own. It is to be left alone before we feel we can handle it.

Living in this world, we, more often than we care to admit, just like the disciples, face change and loss and then somehow, survive; somehow we continue to live and breathe and fully function even when it feels like everything is against us.

Our scripture passage for today is a snippet from a longer farewell discourse between Jesus and his disciples on the night of his arrest.

When Jesus explains that he is going away, he says, "I do not give to you as the world gives." How, then, does the world give?

The world can give us simple, wonderful beauty: a full moon in a clear and crisp night sky, the glory of a surprising sunset, a strong cup of early morning coffee.

But so often, the world also gives us difficulty; struggle. The world gives disappointment. The world gives us continual ups and downs and unpredictable happenings: some human made (like election cycles, with all their maddening twists and turns)- and wars and famines, and the world also gives us products of nature, hurricanes, floods, fires, disease...

We might well live with the sense that however we try to mend this hurting world, it will never be enough and we will not make any difference.

What does one vote mean? How can I really help someone who isn’t willing to accept it? How do I prepare for the unknown?

The New Testament paraphrase of the Bible, ‘The Message’ renders this verse as Jesus saying, "I don't leave you the way you're used to being left--feeling abandoned, bereft."

This world with all its fragile beauty can leave us feeling like the floor is getting ready to fall out from under us, feeling alone, powerless and helpless.

Jesus knows this when he looks at our lives, and he knew this when he looked at the disciples gathered around him. Jesus knew they will be filled with fear as they face the world, and yet, he tells them, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you."

Jesus tells his huddled and worried followers that he does not give as the world gives. He does not leave them the way they're used to being left.

So, with what does he leave them? He leaves them with peace.
He leaves them with the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth. This Spirit will do many things. The Spirit will "teach the disciples everything" and will "remind them of all that Jesus has said." The Spirit will bring to these disciples a peace that will allow them to unravel the trouble in their hearts and maintain a confidence despite the way things appear.

So, to a gathering of people in that upper room who are about to watch their leader be executed by the machinery of a violent empire, the announcement of "peace" must sound absurd. But this is what Jesus gives them. So what on earth does it mean? How is this gift made real?

In our modern, individualized 3rd-millenium minds, "peace" most often carries a personalized meaning. I can be "at peace with myself;" attain ‘inner peace’ and will seek out the peace of a babbling brook. That is well and good, but it's not what Jesus had in mind. The Greek word Jesus uses, ‘eirene’, carries first and foremost the sense of national tranquility, absent the violence and destruction of war; true calm between people.

This is Jesus' parting gift, on the night before his execution. Peace.

Later in his words, he shares another insight of what this peace is like. Jesus tells his disciples, "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but have courage! I have overcome the world." Because Jesus brings peace to this world, we can have courage, even in the face of everything the world throws at us.

When Jesus shares this gift of peace, he knows what the next weeks, months, even millennia will look like to his followers.

He knows that they will be days full of heartache, struggle, worry and fear.

Jesus offers peace to us not so that we can find shelter from the world. He offers us peace that we might be able to enter even more deeply into the world--that we can have the courage to live fully and boldly as disciples, keeping his command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

When everything around us appears to be crumbling, Jesus equips us to keep our faith.

"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives--do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

What Jesus has given us is a deep peace that, however the world looks, we can be confident that love is stronger than hate, that hope is more resilient than fear and despair, and that light can and will break through the darkness.

The peace given through the Holy Spirit allows us to live out the defining commandment Jesus gives to his disciples: to love one another as he has loved us.

Here are two final observations:

In looking for images for this week’s bulletin cover, I found something unexpected. I searched the word “Paraclete’- the Greek word for
Advocate, the word used by Jesus referring to the Holy Spirit. What found was this: Apparently, the manufacturer of this “Paraclete” Releasable Modular Vest (on sale for $450) chose a title they thought inferred invulnerability and secure protection. I’m not so sure that is in line with the New Testament use of this ancient Greek word. (Though I also doubt that those who have need of such vests really care at all what they are named.)

Paraclete comes from the koine (common) Greek word παράκλητος (paráklētos), that can signify one who consoles or comforts, one who encourages or uplifts, and/or one who intercedes on our behalf as an advocate in court.

There is no reference to body armor as a definition for ‘Paraclete.’

In contrast, it seems that though the Paraclete, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, instills some degree of confidence, complete physical safety is not part of one of its guarantees.

The Holy Spirit accompanies us through it all, through all of lifes, with its dangers and toils and snares, and, importantly, teaches us along life’s journey, in ways of peace and forsaking fear, in Jesus’ manner. Though not invulnerable physically, the ‘Paraclete’ gives us a sureness in life and death that no body armor can match.

Finally, I conclude with words shared by Brother David Steindl-Rast, (on the bulletin cover today...) Words about our lives in the Holy Spirit....

“People who have faith are like swimmers who entrust themselves to a flowing river. They neither abandon themselves to its current nor try to resist it. Rather, they adjust their every movement to the watercourse, use it with purpose and skill, and revel in the adventure.”

Conscious of it or not, we live our lives in the Holy Spirit. To swim against it is possible, but that would be ill advised. The current of the world is firmly in God’s hands, in the Spirit of love. The fruit of that Spirit for us to share, is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

To entrust ourselves to the Holy Spirit is our path in life, to follow in the flow of God’s love is what human life is all about.

The Holy Spirit is for us, with us, around us, in us, as we sing, pray, live and learn, all in Jesus’ name. Amen.