

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 25, 2025

The truth is that Jesus said some strange things. Many of the “strange” things he said were the kind that made his listeners scratch their heads and wonder what he was talking about. You know the kind I mean, the ones that were incredibly confusing and nearly impossible to figure out. I’m not talking about those kinds of strange things. No, I’m talking about the things he said that made it seem like he had no idea what “real life” was like, no idea what was on the minds of “regular people”, no idea what people could or could not do. And we just heard one. Maybe you missed it. In the Gospel passage from John we heard Jesus tell his disciples;

“Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.”

Come on, Jesus. How in the world are we supposed to do that? Isn’t the entirety of our lives full of just such things? Doesn’t it dominate nearly all of our days? We worry about our own health and that of a sick child. We have anxiety about possibly losing our job. We are afraid of a boyfriend who has a bad temper. We can’t seem to control an addiction. We are way too far into debt and we don’t see a way out. We can’t afford a retirement home and we’re not well enough to stay in our house. We’re having trouble getting pregnant. We’re heading overseas to fight for our country. We live in a neighborhood that isn’t as safe as it once was. We’re afraid we’ll be alone our whole life.

Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid? Really? Jesus, you clearly don’t know us as well as you think you do.

I’m puzzled by the use of the word “let”. Do not LET your hearts be troubled or afraid. That’s not how this works, right? I don’t LET my heart be troubled or afraid. It’s not in my control. Something bad things occurs that’s out of my control and it just happens – I get anxious and afraid and

troubled and distressed. And if these things are serious enough it can feel as though I am at their mercy, that I am powerless in the face of them. And my joy disappears. My hope disappears. My positivity disappears. My peace disappears.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”

What are we to make of all this? Well, it seems as if Jesus is saying two different things. On one hand he seems to be saying that if we are not at peace, it's because of something WE are doing (or not doing), that it is in some respects a kind of “error” on our part. Yet, just a few seconds later he seems to be saying that peace is a gift given by God, that it is something he bestows upon us from on high. Well, which is it? Is peace something God brings about or WE bring about? As with many things spiritual, it's probably both.

On one hand, every good thing is from God. Every good thing is a gift. None of these “good” things are of our own making. God makes them possible. Any joy we experience, any ability or talent we have, any act of love directed toward another, any accomplishment, any moment of compassion or mercy or understanding, that is, any moment of grace is just that - grace - God sharing his life with us. And so whatever peace we hope to find is the peace that only God can give, a kind of peace that originates in the divine.

Yet, our God never forces things upon us. He doesn't pull strings from above assuring us that we act a certain way or think a certain way or see a certain way. God asks. God invites. God lures. God pursues. But God doesn't “make”, that is, God doesn't act in such a way that we have no choice in the matter, have no part to play. That almost certainly was even the same for Mary - the one whose openness to grace, attentiveness to God's voice, and trust in God's plan, set humanity (and the world) on a new

path, pointed human history in a new direction, opened a door to the One who would save the world.

And so, the word “let” is the proper word because God’s peace can only come about if we remain open to every good thing God desires for us. That includes being open to trusting in God’s promises, being open to a kind of hope that only faith can provide, being open to the certainty and often painful realization that our lives will never unfold exactly the way we want. And that’s okay. There can be no other way. The cross tells us that.

Yet, the necessity of our role in allowing God’s peace to take root reveals a truth that’s so hard for us to believe at times, so hard for us to accept at times. And what is that truth? It’s that the things we need the most, the things that last, the things that matter most deeply, are usually independent of the externals of our lives. In other words, we can be joyful even when sorrowful things come our way. And we can retain hope in the face of disappointment after disappointment. And we can trust even when some people let us down. And we can be generous even when we have little. And we can forgive even when the hurt is deep. And we can be at peace, even amid the chaos and uncertainty of the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.”

My dear friends, I’m not saying achieving this sort of peace is easy. The best things in life and faith, usually aren’t. But it is possible once we “let” God do whatever it is God wants to do for us, through us, and within us. So, let’s open the doors wide and let God in, not once in a while, but every second of every day.

