

## Easter 6 John 14:23-29

Jesus said, “My peace I give to you”. These are the powerful and, in some ways, surprising words from today’s gospel. They are surprising because on the face of it they do not make sense. How can Jesus be talking of peace at a time when he knows very well he is about to be subject to extreme violence? This passage comes as part of John’s gospel known as the farewell discourses and we read them a little out of time as Jesus spoke these words before his arrest and crucifixion. Furthermore, how can Jesus speak of peace when he knows also, by other things he has said, that he is leading his disciples into dangerous times, times when they will witness to his resurrection without him beside them to an all too hostile society?

Perhaps this was the time when the most important thing Jesus could talk about was peace. It is counterintuitive but then, let’s face it, so was Jesus. Should we really have expected mainstream wisdom from the leader who washed the feet of his followers, or ate with the most despised members of society as though they were his closest friends? Surely by now the disciples were used to expecting the unexpected from Jesus.

Perhaps these words, although spoken before Jesus’ death, were in fact echoing in the minds of the disciples after his resurrection. At this time, chronologically in the story, as the disciples were nervously waiting, wondering what was next knowing that the Jewish authorities wanted them wiped out and the Romans were unlikely to be that keen on their message either. Like so many moments in life could it have been that the words meant very little in the context in which they were first heard, when the gang was all together and Jesus firmly in control but came to mean much more as they looked back on happier times. My peace I give to you, how comforting would that have been to a group of people so gripped by anxiety, initially anxiety and grief but lately anxiety and confusion as they find Jesus is not dead but neither is he with them in the same way as he was before.

And if the words promising peace were confusing, what must the disciples have thought about Jesus’ promise of a holy spirit to be amongst them? This time between the resurrection and Pentecost was indeed a time of great worry for those left to build the Christian Church, they must have felt woefully inadequate and completely out of their depth. But Jesus said “My peace I give to you” if they could only cling on to those words and trust them to be true maybe things would be ok.

So what has changed for us, the disciples of Jesus today? Surely in the intervening centuries we’ve got over the anxiety, we have learned to trust Jesus’ leadership, we have no such feelings of inadequacy in our faith? If we think about it honestly, not much has changed at all. Each one of us who walks life’s road as a Christian has to face the same concerns, anxieties and perceived inadequacies, it seems we cannot learn from another’s experience, we have to go through it ourselves. And many of us never truly feel like we’ve quite got it.

This completely unscientific assertion is based on the countless reports from people that follow similar lines. So many of us can relate to this scenario, that we are very happy in our faith, confident in God's love for us, convinced of his hand on our lives and we have a relationship with God through prayer that we value immensely. However, we struggle at times to share that faith with anyone else. We don't know what to say, even when someone else brings it up, we get flustered and worried that we might say the wrong thing. If you are sitting there thinking, this sounds very familiar, know this, you are not the only one in this room that is thinking that right now. And here's another news flash, the clergy and church leaders don't always know what to say either, they don't take every opportunity because sometimes they let their own fears and perceived inadequacies get in the way too.

Jesus said, "My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give". It is very easy to find ourselves in that place, just like the disciples, just like our brothers and sisters in Christ here and elsewhere. In our own strength we cannot do it, we are right to feel a little inadequate when we hold ourselves up to Jesus in comparison. That's what the disciples were going to do, and Jesus knew it and pre-empted it, they would worry about how they would do what the promised without him there beside them. But Jesus remains beside us, not in the same way, but in a very real way. When we trust God and stop trying to do everything by ourselves, we catch glimpses of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. When prayers said in desperation about a situation that we never thought would resolve itself are answered, maybe that is the Holy Spirit. When we experience a coincidence that seems a little too coincidental to be true, maybe that is the Holy Spirit. When we face something we thought would be insurmountable in our life and inwardly felt something of God's peace, then certainly that is the Holy Spirit.

As we approach Ascension Day and remember with awe the lifting of Jesus out of this world alongside the disciples, let us also acknowledge that we sometimes struggle, just as they did. Being a Christian doesn't mean we have everything sorted, that we don't have problems, that we never doubt or falter. Being a Christian is an admission that we cannot or choose not to face what the world has in store for us alone. Jesus said, "My peace I give to you". Let us give thanks for that peace and enjoy it, God's gift to us by grace, and in our encounters with others, whether we speak of faith openly or not, let us share that peace by our witness and our example.