

**“Shalom To You!” [abbreviated version]**

**John 14:23-29**

**Sixth Sunday after Easter: May 9, 2010– Mother’s Day/Festival of the Christian Home**

**A homily by Rev. Dr. Ivan H.M. Peden**

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**MUMC, Thomasville, NC**

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“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you” (John 14:27). The word that Jesus uses is *shalom*. “*Shalom* to you, my friends,” Jesus says. The Jews greeted one another with this word and still do. The risen Christ greeted his disciples this way on Easter evening and he had previously instructed his disciples to greet people in the same way: “In whatever house you enter say first, ‘Peace be to this house.’” (Luke 10:5-6).

To understand the meaning of the peace that Christ gives we have to look to the Bible. In the Bible *shalom* means more than the simple absence of war and lack of disorder. It positively indicates well-being, rest, certainty, success, glory. The Scriptures speak of “the peace of God” (Philippians 4:7) and of the “God of peace” (Romans 15:32). Peace does not mean only what God gives but also who and what God is.

Jesus is pictured here in John’s Gospel as giving us a gift – his Peace, or his *Shalom* – that exceeds all that we can desire. Jesus said it is something that the world cannot give us. It is difficult for American consumers like us to imagine that there could be something that the world cannot give us ...something our money cannot buy.

Yet, God has just such a gift for us in Christ. “*Shalom*, to you,” Jesus said to his disciples, “Peace to you ...my peace I give to you ...and it’s not something the world can give you.” In fact, God’s *shalom*, God’s peace, is greater than anything we can desire or imagine. It encompasses justice and peace among all people. It demands respect for the dignity of every human being. *Shalom*, God’s peace, means becoming a people who seek and serve Christ in *all* persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves.

In his life, ministry, death, and resurrection, Jesus embraced and lived God’s vision of *shalom* for all people. Now Jesus gives us this peace. That is, Jesus makes us stewards of God’s *shalom*. It is Jesus’ parting gift as we approach the day of his Ascension on Thursday of this week. Just so we won’t forget, and so our hearts won’t be troubled at his departure,

Jesus promises that God will send an advocate, the Holy Spirit, who “will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” As stewards of Jesus’ parting gift – peace, *shalom* – we are not alone to practice stewardship. The Holy Spirit will teach us and remind us of this vision of *shalom* for all people.

This vision runs all the way through to the very end of the Bible in the Revelation of John. Last week I referred to the picture of a new heaven and a new earth in Revelation chapter 21. What follows in that same chapter is the vision of a New Jerusalem whose gates are open and never closed to anyone or anything. It is a vision of opening our doors to peoples and nations beyond ourselves. And through it all runs the river of the water of Life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Beside this river is a tree with all kinds of fruit. And the leaves of this tree are for the healing of the nations: no HMOs; no Medicare; no MEDICAID; no Co-pay; no troop deployments; no car bombings; no coercion by violence; no threats of domination. Just pluck the leaves of the tree and be healed. It’s a new kind of healing; it’s a new kind of reconciliation; it’s a new health initiative Jesus offers; it’s a new kind of health care delivery system; it’s a new kind of “peace.” It is God’s own *Shalom*.

When Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you,” Jesus is commissioning us to be those who bring this vision of God’s *shalom* to all people and to all the nations. In giving us this parting gift, Jesus invites us to bathe in this river that flows through the New Jerusalem.

Have we come here today to bathe in this river bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb? We can pray for God to open our hearts ...pray like this: “Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire.” Down by this river of the water of life, all things are possible. It is even possible that our lives can be changed ...our family life can be changed ...our example as parents can be changed ...our church family life can be changed ...our attitudes towards others who are different from us can be changed. We can lay aside and change our long held assumptions, preconceptions, suspicion, mistrust, fear, and prejudice. We can also lay aside and change old understandings of the

Bible. We can become a people with a vision to go to people beyond the four walls of our church, beyond the boundaries of our community, beyond state lines, beyond the United States of America, and let God's ways be known upon the earth, God's *shalom*, God's wholeness, God's saving health for all nations.

One last thought about peace ... We restless humans sometimes wonder: "Is this all there is to life?" Or we think, "If only I had \_\_\_\_\_, or if I could do \_\_\_\_\_, I'd have peace." It will never be. By the time we have what we think we want we would already want something else, right? Lasting satisfaction in life emerges from Christ's *shalom*; it does not come from what we have or what we accomplish, or anything else outside of self. It only comes through the loving, trusting relationship we build with God.

When there is a restlessness that comes from dissatisfaction with life, it exacts a heavy price. But let me take care ... there is such a thing as "holy restlessness." St. Augustine spoke about it and prayed: "Let our hearts be restless, O Lord, until they find their rest in Thee." What I mean is that restlessness is not always an indication of one who is unhappy, or of one who has yet to find one's spiritual core. When given to God, a restless nature can be used for God's purpose.

Peace and passion do not necessarily stand in contradiction to each other. They can work hand-in-hand. Look at the apostle Paul, for example. He had a restless nature long before he met Christ, and it was no less restless after his conversion. But he was able to give that restlessness to God, and instead of changing it, God used it; in fact, God turned the restlessness of Saul into Paul's passion for spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ and for making disciples. Even though driven and restless, battered by conflict from every direction, Paul writes in Philippians chapter 4 "in all these things I have learned to be content." Paul had learned to live in a state of perpetual *shalom*, like an everlasting Sabbath. It is not just Paul's; it is ours, this peace of Christ. But like any gift, it must be accepted and opened in order to fully appreciate it. It must be embraced in order for us to receive all of its benefits.

This morning, on this Mother's Day ... this Festival of the Christian Home ... I want us to imagine God's *shalom*, God's peace, wherever we think it is needed. Can we imagine old hurts and old wounds inflicted by parents, siblings, friends, colleagues, neighbors ... or

inflicted against parents, siblings, friends, colleagues, neighbors ...being healed by the banks of the river of the city of God? Can we open our hearts to let the Light of Christ shine into all their dark corners to drive all fear and anxiety from our midst? Can we allow ourselves to be drawn closer and deeper into the world of God's *shalom*?

Jesus wants to give us all of this ...this and more than we can either begin to desire or to imagine. Listen to Jesus this morning! Listen as Jesus calls us again in words like these: **“My own *shalom* 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. Peace I leave with you. *Shalom* to you now, *shalom*, my friends. *Shalom* is my vision for Memorial ...my vision for Thomasville and the Triad region ...my vision for the United States of America and Africa, for Afghanistan and Iraq ...my vision for my world. As my followers, *shalom* is yours to have and to give to the rest of the world. *Shalom* to you now, my friends.”**  
AMEN.