

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 8, 2010

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Scriptures: Acts 16:9-15, Psalm 67, Revelation 21:22-22:5, John 14:23-29

My Peace I Leave with You

Something very stupid happened this week. Actually, something very stupid happens every week, but that's beyond the point. What I'm talking is the sudden crash that financial markets had this week. It was very strange indeed, because it was happening right in the middle of the recovery of the economy. The whole thing is very confusing, but more or less what happened is that someone, either by mistake or on purpose, made a big sale of stocks. It was such a massive transaction that it called the attention of others. Someone else must have thought that something was going on that they didn't know about and that maybe, just in case, he should get rid of his stocks too, so he sold them in big numbers too. Then three or four other investors thought that if others were selling, then they also should do the same. A little bit later, computer programs that are designed to start selling when the market hits certain thresholds started to get rid of their investments. Pretty soon, and I'm talking here about a matter of a few minutes, fear started to run through Wall Street and everybody went into panic mode trying to unload their portfolios. There was no particular reason; they were just doing what everybody else seemed to be doing. "The markets are crashing; the recession is back. We are doomed!" In the end, it was just a glitch. Nothing really dramatic was happening with the economy. More likely than not, it was an error made by someone what triggered the whole thing. But that's all it took to get everybody to be afraid.

Now, I don't know if you can relate at all to that illustration. We probably don't have too many investors who know how Wall Street works, but this much I know. Much of what happens in the economy is driven out of fear. For many investors, maybe for most, if they have enough fear that they will lose money, they will do something drastic even if they don't know why. They act out of fear which is precisely what seems to have happened last Thursday at the New York Stock Exchange. They were afraid.

What do you do when you are afraid? When the prophet Elijah got afraid because of Jezebel, he went to hide in a cave. When Jonah got afraid to go preach at Nineveh, he went the opposite way. When Peter got afraid of the people asking if he was one of Jesus' followers, he denied him three times. Fear can be a very powerful thing. It can make us do things that we would not normally do. We get anxious, we stop thinking and we start acting irrationally or contrary to our beliefs. I must confess that I've been afraid too. I must confess that I also have had anxiety and have done some irrational things. Right before coming to Emanuel as pastor I had plenty of fear and anxiety. I was in a completely different situation, in a completely different place. I didn't where to go or who to talk to. I was trying things because I didn't know any better. I didn't know what I was going to do. I even questioned my own sense of calling. I know, I know; practice what you preach, right? Well, it's one thing to say it, and quite another to practice it. Again, when we act out of fear or anxiety we not necessarily behave in the way we normally would. Fear

takes control of our emotions. Roosevelt was right when he said that the only thing to fear was fear itself.

As Jesus is preparing to leave, his disciples have fear, not that anyone can blame them. In the last evening they spend with their master and friend before Jesus' death, they wanted to know why things were happening in such a way. James G. Somerville wrote an article for *The Christian Century* entitled "Who Will Take Care of Us?" He suggests the following dialogue in which the disciples ask questions that Jesus answers in chapters 13 and 14 of the gospel of John.

They ask, "Where are you going?" And Jesus responds, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am there you may be also." [14:3]

The want to know, "Can we go with you?" But Jesus says, "Where I am going you cannot come." [13:33]

They insist, "How long will you be gone?" To which Jesus answers, "A little while and you will no longer see me, and again a little while and you will see me." [14:19]

And then finally, "Who will take care of us?" So the Lord reassures them, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." [14:16]

And then I think there is another question in the gospel reading for today: "How are we going to make it?" And Jesus says, "My peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Now, in the mind of the disciples Jesus' response may have taken the price to greatest understatement ever. "Say what?" they must have reacted. It just sounded like the wrong thing to say. "What do you mean by peace? Have you seen what's going on around us? They are looking for you to kill you. What do you mean have no trouble, do not be afraid? Do you know what you are talking about? Do you have any sense of what's about to happen?" Again, is one thing to talk about faith, and quite another to practice it. And that's truly something that we can relate to. I mean, it's difficult to have faith in the midst of all what's going on right now around the world. Market crashes, endless wars, churches in conflict, political fights, oil spills, terrorism. And yet we're not supposed to be troubled? How are we supposed to have peace?

But then maybe what we need is a different perspective. Maybe what we need is to see it from God's point of view. If we just could put our fear under control, we may be able to get it. After all, Jesus says, "The peace I give to you is not the same as the world's." It's different. Usually we think of peace as the absence of conflict or other evils. So when countries are not at war, and people are not being oppressed, and no one has to fear, then there's peace. And in fact, that does sound pretty accurate. But I also believe that Jesus wants us to think even beyond that. Maybe peace is not just the absence of something, but the presence of something on its own. Maybe peace is that possibility of creating something good in the midst of the troubled times. Maybe peace is the potential to find God even when God is difficult to be found. Like the cross itself which they all thought was the end of everything but which God was able to make into the victory of everything. When you are able to think in such a way, when we are able to have such a peace in our hearts, we may just be able to control our fear.

There's really nothing to it. It's not a big deal. We don't have to go through a deep emotional conversion. It's just a conscious decision that we take to believe and have faith. There's no magic to it, but it's really important. I'm reminded, today that we celebrate Mother's Day, that mothers can heal just about anything with almost nothing. Like the very well known chicken soup. My grandmother used to say that a chicken soup could heal anything and everything. And it actually did. If you were feeling sick, or out of shape, or simply blue, mama would give you a bowl of home-prepared, good-old-fashion chicken soup and everything was well again. How did it work? I don't know. When you think about it, there's nothing to it; it's just chicken. What seemed to make a difference is that mama prepared it for you. And she would put love and attention to it. And just the thought of your mother's love was enough to make you feel well all over again.

Maybe that's how the peace of God works. It may not actually do much to get rid of the situations around us. The fact of the matter is that things that make us have fear still exist. Jesus is still going to the cross. Our future is still uncertain. But God is saying have peace. Trust in me. If you act out of love instead of out of fear, you will find peace. It's a call to have faith.

Faith doesn't take away the difficult things in life, it just keeps them from dominating, from having mastery, from defining who I am and the possibilities around me. It's like these things – our needs, wants, broken places – they still are accurate *descriptions* of us, at least parts of us, but they no longer *define* us. We are more than what's missing. We are, as Paul says and Revelation promises, a new creation. Faith makes this possible. Faith understood not as some divine plug for the hole we each carry around inside of us, but rather as a summons to be more, to live and love more, to share more because there is so much more that God desires and designed for us. That's the kind of peace that the world cannot give but that God can. Let's live in that peace. Amen.