

**“The Gift of Peace”**

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**May 26, 2019**

**Memorial Day Weekend**

**First Congregational Church of Haddam**

**Higganum Congregational Church**

**John 14:23-29**

*23 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. 24 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.*

*25 “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26 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. 27 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.*

*28 You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. 29 And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.*

Memorial Day is about remembering and taking inspiration from the courage and sacrifice of those who have laid down their lives.

So this is a good text for us this weekend because Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure. He isn't going to war, but he is going out... to die. They, like the families left behind when soldiers don't come home, will need to figure out how to go on.

And so he tells them, and us as the church that continues to live and work in his memory and honor:

- Keep my word, our Father's word, and we will dwell with you.
- The Father will send the “Paraclete,” translated as “Advocate” what we know as the Holy Spirit, to teach and remind them of him.

He promises them his own Peace as his legacy, tells them to attend to their hearts, not to be troubled or afraid.

And he then reminds them of the need for him to go, gently chiding them in Verse 28 that it is because of their very love for him that they should rejoice to release him, since the Father to whom he goes and who is their provider is “greater than” him; they are to “believe” that the Paraclete the Father will send in his place will be more *of him* for them and us who are to come, “greater than” what they could have if they held on to Jesus.

These are beautiful, but tough things to hear. Being separated in the present and in the flesh from one we love for some future, intangible good, any loss that we bear for an unseen new reality, is

terribly difficult. The pain of such losses, whether of Jesus' presence for the disciples, or of empty chairs at home during service members' deployment, or forever, is awful. Knowing how difficult it will be, Jesus prepares his disciples by assuring them of his legacy, the Gift of Peace, a gift we continue to seek to receive.

I was 7 years old when the Vietnam War ended, and the Berlin Wall came down two days before my twenty-first birthday. I was 22 when the US drove Iraqi forces out of Kuwait in a 4-day ground campaign. A decade later when 19 mainly Saudi terrorists attacked the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon, my younger child was just 21 days old, but as often has been observed, the brunt of the conflicts in which the US has since then been engaged mainly has borne by service members and their families, not the rest of us without family in uniform.

All this is to say that I and my children have lived mostly shielded by time and circumstance from the suffering and sacrifice of war. I and others of my generation came up in what we despite the Cold War, would have called "peacetime," and my children in a time of perpetual, but remote, war.

It was different even for my husband, who is just 8 years older than I am. He watched his uncle deploy during the Vietnam era and come back, with the war still with him. John's older step-brother enlisted during that Cold War "peacetime" a little later, and died at the VA from an illness he officially *didn't get* from nuclear exposure on a ship.

It was different for my father, too young and subsequently too near-sighted for the World War in which two of his older brothers served, one, my Uncle Melvin whom I knew as a kid, who flew for the Air Force in the Pacific Theater, where he purchased these pearls I wear today for his mother back home, and then as a gunner in Europe where his plane was shot down in Russian-occupied Poland in 1945. It was different for my paternal grandparents, who during this time didn't know how to find their son, and received word back from the Air Force that they didn't know where he was either, but were sure he was ok.

These differences, from each other and from those in previous living generations shape how we hear Jesus' pre-departure promise of Peace. For me, at least, it's difficult even to imagine what it feels like knowingly to send one's brother, father, son- or daughter- off into harm's way.

In my line of work, though, I do I think have somewhat more experience than average with death and funerals. Not with my own father or mother yet, but with many fathers and mothers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and even, most terribly, with beloved children. I have been there time and again to witness the power of a legacy handed on, even up from the young, legacies of Love, Courage, Wisdom, Faith, and, yes, even Peace.

*"I am going away, and I am coming to you."* In the King James, it's *"I go away, and come again unto you."* In one sense, it makes no sense. Why must you go? Why? We don't want to take your body from the cross, Jesus, or minister to your body in the tomb, but to sit with you at Table, to travel with you and hear you tell your parables, see you touch and heal. *Stay!*

We don't want to watch you stuff your duffle or organize your pack to march off. We don't want to see the machines measuring your heart rhythm and respiration fall dark. We may put on a brave face until the door closes behind or the code is called for those we love, but then the ache we've shoved down in the pit of our stomach rises like a storm surge engulfing us. *Stay!*

But when Jesus did not, when those we love cannot, when eventually our heads rise up from those fierce waters of our grief such that we are in them, but no longer overwhelmed, no longer drowning, we begin to receive our legacy, our gift.

*27Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.*

If it is our legacy, we must seek to understand the gift. What is Peace?

There is a story told that once there was a King who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried. The King looked at all the pictures, but there were only two he really liked, and he had to choose between them.

(<http://www.agiftofinspiration.com.au/stories/personalgrowth/picture.shtml>)

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror, for peaceful towering mountains were all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains, too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky from which rain fell and in which lightening played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This did not look peaceful at all. But when the King looked, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest in perfect peace.

The King chose the second picture, 'Because' he explained, 'peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace.'

May we receive and know the Peace of Christ, and from that place of holy rest and confidence, may our hearts be given strength to live out our calling. Amen.