

John 14:23-29
Psalm 67
May 25, 2025

Peaceful Hearts

Whenever there is an opportunity to read one of the miracle stories from the Bible, especially one from the gospels involving Jesus, it is always good to do so even if it is not the main focus of the message. This morning there are two gospel texts, both from the Gospel of John, one from the 5th and the other from the 14th chapter, thus, from different parts of the story. The one from the 14th will serve as the focus, but the healing story from the 5th chapter is also worthy of our time and attention.

It is a precious spiritual exercise to simply hear the story read, for it sets it on the mind and in the heart for the coming day, and the week ahead.

The first is the healing of the man who was crippled, given in John 5:1-9:

“After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Hebrew called Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. 3 In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed. 5 One man was there, who had been ill for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time, he said to him, “*Do you want to be healed?*” 7 The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the

pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me.” 8 Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your pallet, and walk.” 9 And at once the man was healed, and he took up his pallet and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath.”

One wonders at the features of this text. There is the powerful display of God’s healing power in the restoration of the crippled man, too immobilized to get to the water when the pool was stirred, but healed nonetheless by the word of Jesus and at his command.

And then at the end of the scene the simple statement of fact, that it occurred on a Sabbath, which was problematic for those who seek God’s blessing and peace as the result of the correct observation of the religious demands, and of right belief. In the following verses an astonishing fuss is made over the fact that the healing occurred on a Sabbath.

It is later in the gospel story that Jesus shares the last meal with his disciples at the fateful Passover at which his earthy life would be given, that Jesus at length explains his departure, the presence of the Paraclete, which is the Holy Spirit, and the Peace of God he leaves to them.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled; you trust in God, trust also in me.”

This verse is the way the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John begins, and is one of the many texts that have risen to a place of prominence among all the other texts, if not the most well-known, at least the better known.

Later in that same chapter, while Jesus is still having the same conversation with his disciples at their final meal together, he gives them the following line, that serves a companion to the first verse, and is a part of the 2nd gospel reading.

“Peace I leave with you; *my peace* I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

It is right to assume that in this moment Jesus was admonishing his followers towards peaceful hearts because he knew in fact that they were troubled. In fact, who would not be troubled at heart, anxious about things, if they were in the situation Jesus and his friends were in at the time.

Or, if they were in the situation of the crippled man, already mentioned. One is perplexed about the situation of the one's who were more concerned about the Sabbath than the man's health, but there may be reasons for that as well.

Jesus and his followers had come to Jerusalem for a reckoning, and things had not gone as expected. According to all the gospel accounts, Jesus knew and tried to convince them that their notions of triumph

would fail to come to pass. By Thursday evening, it must have been clear.

Any way one might have viewed it, there would have been some anxiety, if only the kind of anxiety one always experiences on the night before important event. But if one *senses that there is something amiss*, excited anticipation can turn to restlessness and fear; a sense of doom ensues; *troubled hearts*.

2,000 years later the faithful find themselves in similar circumstances. As a matter of fact, the circumstances are universal and ever-present, they rise above the specific historical situation, no matter where, when, and what characterizes them. There is always a reason to be troubled.

We are caught between the beauty and pleasure of life on the one hand, and its trials and troubles on the other, both the ones that are common, associated with the general conditions under which every person has always lived; and the ones that are unique, associated with a particular time and place, or with our personal lives. The wonder and beauty of life is set next to the tragedy, as they say, of the human condition.

Just as a review, we might think of the human condition as having three characteristics, and I make my usual footnote to Paul Tillich:

1 - We are mortal. Mortality refers not only to the reality of death, which is universal, but also to the givenness of our lives. We have no control over the

time and place and most of the situations in life. Even the state of the world is a given. There are only a few decisions we can make to shape our lives.

2 - We live under a moral demand. Even those who reject traditional moral ideas do so as if compelled by a moral concern. The demand itself, as it is, not only refers to the realities and convictions about right and wrong, good and evil, but the unease, sometimes called guilt, that also accompanies us, the sense that we have failed to live up to the demand.

3 - Finally, there is a seemingly innate desire for life to have meaning, and is weighed down by an anxiety associated with the suggestion that there is no such thing.

These three sources of unease make their way all throughout life. One way or another they are the general source of the restlessness in our hearts. It is not humanly possible to live outside the stress of these threats. There is nothing sinful about the stress itself.

They are resolved in the death and resurrection of Jesus, who is called the Christ. We are not alone. God is with us. The Presence of God is what Jesus leaves with his disciples just before his departure, and thus God's peace.

One does not obtain this peace as an achievement; *it is a gift*. Paul says it *beggars understanding*. It is not and can never be the result of a good life lived, or the

successful completion of a self-help program; it is not to be found at the school or the mall or online or the bank, or at the hospital, or at work, which at best treat only the symptoms; or, dare I say, at home, at church.

One can not *have enough* of anything to ensure it. It cannot be grasped. It can't be purchased. Wealth and power and pleasure are helpless before it. They can not bring it about, and they can not keep it away. The more likely result of its pursuits in these other places is a greater, not a lesser anxiety.

But it *is* experienced as a grace in the daily presence of the Lord, apprehended, as it were, by faith. Upon this *we can rely*.

We will sing a hymn this morning that is one I did not grow up singing, but is becoming a part of my hymnal *within* the hymnal. I draw attention to it today because it is a peaceful hymn about the abiding presence of God.

It is also in tune with the meaning of Memorial Day because it is written about and by someone who was facing their mortality, a man dying of Tuberculosis back in the middle of the 19th century, thus it addresses the meaning of death by those who have faced it in its intensity, like those who have faced it in the defense of freedom.

Remarkably, it has a presence in culture that makes me wonder that I had not heard of it. It is sung each year at the FA Cup (a kind of Super Bowl of soccer,

held each year in Wembley Stadium in London), in episodes of Downton Abbey, Foyle's War, in Ken Burns documentaries, and is common at funerals. It is also a Scottish hymn. Listen to its message as we sing it through; hear its resolve, its petition, and its faith.

But first, let us pray, and hear the psalm of the day as our concluding prayer, it is the 67th;

Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
2 that thy way may be known upon earth,
thy saving power among all nations.
3 Let the peoples praise thee, O God;
let all the peoples praise thee!
4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for thou dost judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth.
5 Let the peoples praise thee, O God;
let all the peoples praise thee!
6 The earth has yielded its increase;
God, *our God*, has blessed us.
7 God has blessed us;
let all the ends of the earth fear him!

Amen.

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