The Peace of Christ In A Chaotic World

John 14:15-31

One of the best newspaper cartoons of all time is Calvin and Hobbes. One day Calvin and Hobbes come marching into the living room early one morning. His mother is seated there in her favorite chair. She is sipping her morning coffee. She looks up at young Calvin. She is amused and amazed at how he is dressed. Calvin’s head is encased in a large space helmet. A cape is draped around his neck, across his shoulders, down his back and is dragging on the floor. One hand is holding a flashlight and the other a baseball bat.

“What’s up today?” asks his mom. “Nothing, so far,” answers Calvin. “So far?” she questions.

“Well, you never know,” Calvin says, “Something could happen today.” Then Calvin marches off, “And if anything does, by golly, I’m going to be ready for it!”

Calvin’s mom looks out at the reading audience and she says, “I need a suit like that!”

That’s the way many of us feel as we see the news and deal with life. Sometimes this world seems quite violent and people seem to be at each other’s throats. A suit like that would help, so we can say with Calvin, “Whatever may come my way, I’m going to be ready for it! Bring it on!”

Well, I don’t have a suit like Calvin’s to give you this morning, but I do have word for this morning: 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.

There is a defining phrase in that statement. One that tells us what kind of peace it is that Christ gives us. Listen to it again and see if you can pick it out: “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.” The defining phrase is: “Not as the world gives.” Do you see how that defines God’s peace? The world promises peace through the rule of law. Law and order is the only way for a society and a people to experience peace and law and order must be kept by the aggressive use of force. That’s the only way that the world can bring about peace.

But here is how Jesus will give you peace. If you obey his word, He and the Father will come to you and make a home with you. Right in your heart. Not by force but by choice. They will abide in your heart bringing peace. The world’s peace is peace through strength. The Lord’s peace is peace through surrender.

We have all been asked by our children: if you could have any wish what would it be? I think the most common answer given is world peace. Peace is important. Jesus makes a point to tell his disciples that he going to leave them with peace. Peace is part a vital part of our faith. Let’s look a little closer at what Jesus means by peace:

There is the Peace the World Gives. Jesus recognized this kind of peace. What kind of peace is this? What did he have in mind? I think Jesus understood history. Any Jew during Jesus’ time could rattle off all the small skirmishes of their history: Ammonites, Philistines, Amalekites, the Moabites and several others. Any Jew could also name the devastating conflicts with Assyria and Babylon, the periods of exile. And if history was not enough every time a Jew stepped out his door in the morning there were the Romans. A constant reminder they were still a conquered people. There is a peace that the world gives and to the Jews it had not been given for a very long time. They understood how fleeting peace was. And to make this picture complete, Israel has not known national stability since that time. So for 2500 years they have looked for a place of rest.

We too. From the Revolutionary War to the War on Terror unrest has marked our nation.

“Peace,” Jesus said, “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.” You can then read between the lines of Jesus’ words: This new covenant is not a covenant of land; it is a covenant of my blood. It is not a covenant of nation building; it is a covenant of relation building. He is telling his disciples:

* You no longer live on land; you live on love.
* You no longer work for nation; you work for neighbor.
* You no longer are under the Law; you are under grace.
* You no longer act out of fear; you serve out of joy.

To leave them with anything else would doom them to repeating the mistakes of the past. The Nation can no longer be the model for their peace. It is caught in this trap, as is every other nation, of trying to find national political peace. So Jesus has to do something different. He must change their relationship to God. He must reshape their lives into something other than countrymen. He must make them Christian men. Their theology no longer tied to the nation but tied to Christ, through Christ to the Father.

So the world offers us political peace but it also tried to offer us personal peace, that very deep and personal peace that we all long for. The late advice columnist Ann Landers used to receive something like 10,000 letters a month. When asked what the most common topic was, she answered that most people seem to be afraid of something. They are afraid of losing their health, their job, or their family. They are afraid of upsetting their neighbor, alienating a friend, or committing a social faux pas. Many are even afraid when there is no reason to be afraid. Ours is a world of fearful people.

Worldly peace, whether political or personnel, is hard to come by. I am not saying it doesn’t exist, but we all know every time we get up in the morning, watch the news, hear from family, talk to friends that this kind of peace is temporary at best.

But there is the peace the Lord Gives. When Dante knocked at the door of the Franciscan monastery he was ask, "What do you want?" He replied, "Peace!" It is one of the deepest desires of our heart.

I recall the story of a little girl who, when trains were popular transportation, was taking her first train ride with her parents. As night descended on the train, the mother took the girl, who was clearly quite anxious, and placed her on the upper bunk of the sleeper. She told her little one that up there she would be nearer to God and that God would watch over her.

As silence enveloped the young lady, she became afraid and called softly, "Mommy, are you there?" "Yes dear," came the response. A little later, in a louder voice, the child called, "Daddy, are you there, too?"

"Yes dear," was the reply. After this had been repeated several times one of the passengers sharing their sleeper car finally lost his patience and shouted, "Yes, we're all here, your father, your mother, your brother, and all your aunts and cousins; now settle down and go to sleep!"

There was a moment of silence and then, in hushed tones a little voice asked, "Mommy, was that God?"

You may be someone who has had little doubt about God's presence in your life. You may be someone who has felt comfort from God. You may be well acquainted with peace. If you are one of these people you are one of few, for most people fear. They fear the darkness, they fear the day, they fear people, the law, family, friends, enemies, life, and death. You name it. Fear is all around us. So Jesus made it clear to his disciples that he wanted them to have peace and that he would leave that peace with them.

How do we receive this peace? Jesus is straightforward. It is through obedience. Those who obey his word will receive his peace. Obedience is what we give in order that we might receive the peace that Jesus gives.

We will do well if we remember that true peace is the assurance that one day our Jesus will return to take us back to our Father’s house. So, do not let your hearts be troubled neither let them be afraid. Amen