

“Make Peace”

For the second week in a row, our Gospel reading includes a prediction of Jesus’ passion – he will be “betrayed”, “killed” and “he will rise again.” The disciples do not understand what he was saying. They are even “afraid” to ask what this means.

The response to the first prediction of his death, as we heard in the Gospel reading last week, was Peter trying to “rebuke” Jesus. “God forbid... this shall never happen to you... ” (Matthew 16:22) And Jesus saying to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men.”

This time the response by the disciples is arguing, trying to say one disciple is “greater” than another. When we hear disturbing news about someone we care about, we wonder how this will affect our own lives. We may become anxious, frightened even. The disciples let their anxiety lead them into arguing about status, power, control. Who does the rabbi favor? Who will be leader if he really does die?

Jesus tries to help them understand about servant leadership; about trust; about dependency; about peace. So he holds a child in his arms, probably a very young child, maybe 3 years old. And he tells the disciples to learn from the child – learn about trust, faith, peace, joy.

Mark tells us in the next chapter that people were bringing young children to Jesus for a blessing and the disciples tried to stop them. Jesus was angry and he told the disciples “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it...” (Mark 10:13-16) Children can teach us about God’s love, God’s peace, God’s joy.

Jesus is often teaching his disciples about peace. At the start of his ministry, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says “Blessed are the peace makers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5:9) On the night before his death, after the Last Supper, after washing the disciples feet, Jesus tells them “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled...” (John 14:27) And, then, 3 days later, on the night of the Resurrection, the Risen Christ appears to 10 of his disciples and says, “Peace be with you.” Jesus’ message in life, in death, in resurrection is “peace.”

Those following Jesus in the 1st century tried to live by this teaching, but they lived in a violent world. The Roman Empire persecuted, arrested, executed Christians. St. Paul had been a zealous persecutor of Christians before his conversion. Once he discovered God’s love in Christ, he discovered peace. He wrote about the need for peace in all of his letters.

At the end of every Eucharist we hear his words to the Philippians, “The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds ... in Christ Jesus...” (4:7) Paul calls us to the ministry of reconciliation; the ministry of resolving conflict, making peace. (2 Cor 5:19-20)

James, writing a little later in the 1st century, encourages his readers to a ministry of service, living in the wisdom that comes from “above.” Like a young child be “pure, peaceable,

gentle, willing to yield” ... “a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace...”

Our world needs “peace makers,” “children of God” who will work for reconciliation, the resolution of conflict. It starts with each one of us – as we look into our own hearts, our own lives. James reminds us that conflict, violence even, grows out from inside our hearts, our souls, from our cravings and desires for power and control.

Each time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist we pass the peace. This is God’s peace for us; the peace we are called to live in the world. Passing the peace is so much more than a simple greeting or a friendly welcome. When this was first introduced into the liturgy some 45-50 years ago, many people found this to be difficult. That’s a reminder to me that making peace **is** difficult. What we’ll share in a few minutes is a sacramental symbol of James teaching about peace; it’s a reminder of Paul’s call to be ministers of reconciliation; it is a concrete celebration of Jesus’ teaching, “Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called children of God...”

James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a
Mark 9:30-37