

The Rev. Anne Michele Turner
Trinity Sunday, Year C (June 12, 2022)
Romans 5:1-5
Grace Episcopal Church, Alexandria, Virginia

I want to talk with you on this Trinity Sunday about peace, and about how we find peace.

Language about peace is woven all through the New Testament. It's so common that it's easy to ignore, or at least to assume that we know what it means. Today in Romans: "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Well, of course. I mean, isn't that obvious?

And yet this is the kind of sentence that means more than we think it does. Because peace, in the New Testament, is a loaded word.

Anyone who heard Paul's letters back when they were first written would immediately think of the way peace had been branded by the state: the Pax Romana. This peace was certainly not the individual peace of a quiet room and a calm mind, and it wasn't even the absence of interpersonal or interstate violence. It was peace by force.

This Roman peace was sold to the people as the product of the empire. Because the state invested in military strength, because it kept a tight leash on its colonies, because it squashed cultural difference and political dissent, there was stability. The empire had power over everyone. And that power over was called peace.

So when Paul says that we have peace through Jesus? That statement is not as obvious as we think.

Paul is showing us a different idea of what peace is and a different idea of how power works. Instead of the absence of conflict, we have the fullness of love. And instead of the violent power shown by the emperor, we have an alternative. Paul talks not about power over, but power with. This is not coercive power but relational power.

How do we get the life we want? Paul says nothing about military strength or political clout. Instead of force, he talks about suffering as the starting point of peace. And then he gives us this image of nurture and divine cooperation: the Holy Spirit pouring into our hearts. We're not being constrained. We're being filled up.

This lesson, of course, has been chosen for Trinity Sunday, because it shows us something of how God works. And if you read through all the lessons, you will find similar images of God creating power through cooperation. It's both in God's nature and in God's way of doing business.

The reading from Proverbs describes the second person of the Trinity—sometimes called Jesus and sometimes called Wisdom—as partnering with God from the get go. And both the Psalm

and the Gospel remind us of how all God wants to do is collaborate. God teams up with human beings in creation and in the redemption of creation alike.

The power of the empire is the power of the gun. It relies on coercion and it brings conformity. But the power of the spirit? It is the power of the bucket. It is poured out. It feeds. It washes. It cleans up. It waters and brings new life.

I am talking about peace this morning because I believe most of us are longing for it. Amidst so much in this world that is unsteady and unpredictable and unreliable, we want quiet. And I suspect that deep desire makes us more willing to accept quiet at a high cost. I have noticed, in my own life, that I am willing to compromise where once I would have resisted, simply because my energy got used up by the last crisis.

I suspect very few people thought the Pax Romana was right. But I think a lot of people found it manageable. And so they took the bargain.

God offers something better. God offers us real peace. The God we know in the Trinity has a relationship at the very heart of the divine nature. The God of the Trinity constantly invites us not as subjects but as partners. When we accept that invitation, our life is not always easy, but it becomes so good.

We have a long season of Pentecost ahead of us now. Our lessons turn from the doctrine we get today towards what it means to live that doctrine out. All summer long, we'll learn about the teaching of Jesus and the life of his disciples. And what we will see there, over and over, is examples of and invitations to relationships. To walk along the road together. To sit down and have dinner. To talk. To listen. To pray. To forgive. To wonder. The gospel asks to collaborate with God, and to collaborate with one another.

This is a different way of being than the striving we are so often used to. We are not asked to be in charge of anything or anyone at once. We are not even necessarily asked to *do* anything or accomplish anything. The peace that God invites us to this Trinity Sunday has nothing to do with that kind of power.

As you look ahead at the summer stretching out before you, I invite you to this practice of Trinity: seek God's peace. Don't settle for the cheap substitute of calm or stability. Hold out for the real thing. Take the risk of connection, of opening your tired heart for real compassion, real affection, real love. The Holy Spirit is waiting to pour into you—and then to pour out of you, into the whole rest of the world.

We have peace with God. We have been promised it, and now it is our gift and our challenge to live in that peace, and nowhere else.