

THE PEACE OF GOD

A Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity, 2011

On the Text: Propers for the Day

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Shalom! Eirēnē! Grace to you and Peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The exact wording of that last sentence is at the opening of St. Paul's epistles to the Romans, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Second Thessalonians, and Philemon. He gives a close variation of that theme at the beginning of First Thessalonians, First and Second Timothy, and Titus. Peace is the theme of the Propers for Today as it is set out for us in the Collect: *Grant O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance, that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Peace, so greatly desired, is something we have a hard time defining. Is it a condition, a state of mind, a commodity, or some combination of these and other things? In 1938, Neville Chamberlain thought of Peace as a commodity, and that he had bought it by giving away something to Hitler that was not his to give, a region of Czechoslovakia the Germans called the Sudetenland. He thought he had gotten, "...Peace in our time,... Peace with honor." I recall reading that someone, I think it was Winston Churchill, but can't be sure of that, quoted Jeremiah 6:14 back at him, saying, "There are those who cry, '*Peace, Peace, when there is no Peace*'."

What is Peace? Is it just what most dictionaries give as their first definition of the concept: a freedom from war or hostilities? Well, not entirely. Secondary definitions expand this idea to freedom from just about anything in any area of human interaction that might be unpleasant: freedom from civil strife or dissension, freedom from mental disturbance or stress; thus, a condition of calm, quiet, tranquility, harmony, concord, amity. It would seem that is the secular definition. Yet, for thousands of years, the godly definition has been all that and more.

I opened this by saying "Shalom!" and then "Eirēnē!" (*Ἐιρήνη*), which are the words for *Peace* in Hebrew and Greek respectively. The meaning of each of these words has always had a secular component that carried all of the usual meanings in our English dictionaries. However, *shalom* seems to have carried other meanings along with it for several thousands of years. When a Jew, or anyone, wishes you "Shalom.", He is not just saying "Peace be with you." in the usual secular senses; he is wishing you good health, prosperity, and salvation; at least, that is the

understanding we should have of the word, *Peace*, when we read the OT; for that is the way it is used in Aaron's blessing that God gave to Moses in Numbers 6:23-26 **23 "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, 24 The LORD bless you and keep you; 25 the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.** It is almost as if a person who says, "Shalom." is saying in that one word, "God bless you in every way." Shalom is at its root far more all-encompassing than is *eirēnē* (ἡσυχία), yet when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek in about 280 to 250 BC, shalom was almost always translated as *eirēnē* (ἡσυχία) or a derivative of it. In the NT, except in one instance, *eirēnē* (ἡσυχία), or some variant of it is the only word that is translated as Peace. That exception is the word, *galēnē* (γαλήνη), which refers calm, that is peaceful, waters, especially the sea. This is the word that describes the Sea of Galilee after Jesus said to the storm, in Mark 4:39 after the disciples in fear for their lives woke him up: Mark 4:39 **39 And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.** That calm is *galēnē* (γαλήνη).

When Jesus sent out 72 disciples to go on a missionary trip as described in Chapter 10 of St. Luke's Gospel in verses 1-12, He told them to pronounce the blessing of Peace on every house they enter. In Luke 10:5-6, we read, **5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' 6 And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you.** In the Prayer Book on page 308, you can see that this is something that all ministers of this church are supposed to say whenever they visit the sick at a home, but it is something that most of our ministers do, at least under their breath, whenever they visit anyone's house.

The Aaronic blessing is a blessing of the Peace of God, and so is any blessing of Peace pronounced by Jesus or His disciples. The most comprehensive of Jesus' blessings of Peace is seen in John 14:27, where He says: **27 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, neither let them be afraid.** Here Jesus found it necessary to add to this blessing, "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" because He knew they were troubled and afraid. He said this to them on Maundy Thursday evening, shortly before they went out to the Garden of Gethsemane where he was betrayed by Judas Iscariot. Obviously, one's heart is not at peace if one is troubled or afraid.

Have you ever felt the Peace of God in your heart? Felt it so completely, that nothing could shatter that sense of calm and happiness, and you knew that it was the work of Holy Spirit within you, giving you an infinitesimal sense, a tiny taste, of what heaven might be like, so that when it passed, you knew how dull and tawdry this fallen world is? We ask for God's Peace in this world, but we should know that if and when it comes, it cannot last; for just as Jesus told us at the end of Chapter 16 of St. John's Gospel: John 16:32-33 **32 Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. 33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."** In a world that was filled with God's Peace, there would be no tribulation. Unfortunately, this world is not yet that world. That is the world St. Peter spoke of in today's Epistle lesson, a world that he points toward the end of, when he says: 1 Peter 3:14-15 **14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy,** We may suffer for Christ's sake in this world, but we shall be rewarded in the world to come, as Jesus told us in the sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5:10 **10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

God's Peace is found throughout the Bible. The word, Peace, is found in 340 verses in the ESV and in 400 verses in the KJV of the Bible, often times more than once in a single verse, from Genesis to Revelation. In the special OT lesson for today, God speaks through Zechariah and predicts a **"sowing of Peace"**. In Zechariah 8:12-13 we read, **12 For there shall be a sowing of peace. The vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew. And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. 13 And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing.** God does not say what the seeds of Peace are, but does predict that: a remnant of Judah and Israel shall reap its harvest, that they **"shall possess all these things."** The first part of this reading ends with God's telling them in Zechariah 8:19 **Therefore love truth and peace.** However, in the second part of this lesson, which is a prophecy everyone should recognize, we learn the source of this Peace: Zechariah 9:9-10 **9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he,**

humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. 10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

A further revelation that one of the blessings of the Messiah will be Peace is shown in the song of the angels in Luke 2:13-14 **13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"**

In Romans 15:33, God is named as the God of Peace as St. Paul pronounces a blessing on his readers: **33 Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.** In Ephesians 2:13-14, when talking to the Gentiles in Ephesus and how they were once separated from God and the from the Jews, St. Paul tells us that Christ is our Peace and we are separated no more: **13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;**

Even this much progress toward the unity Christ wants for us makes some angry, especially one named Satan, who does his best (worst) to cause evil men to work for dissension and conflict and against the way of Peace. Dante had a name for such people and a special place for them in his imagined hell with its many layers of punishment. He called them Sowers of Discord.

Dante's hell had nine circles, some of which had sub circles called bolgias. The Sowers of Discord are condemned to the Ninth Bolgia of the Eighth Circle, where they are condemned to be hacked by a demon with a sword and then drag themselves around that bolgia during which they heal up and are whole just before they get back to the demon to be hacked up again. There is no passage in the Bible that indicates that there might be any such punishment for any kind of sin. However, we do need to know that in Proverbs 6, the Sowers of Discord are described a one of the seven things that God hates: Proverbs 6:16 **16 There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: ... Proverbs 6:19 9 a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.** It is not a good idea to be someone whom the Lord hates, especially since it should now be obvious that Peace is something the Lord loves.

The Gospel lesson for today is St. Luke's version of the story of the response of Peter and Andrew, and James and John to Jesus' call to follow Him. On the surface, this may not seem to have much to do with this theme of Peace; but it is when we know their whole story. They

followed Him, learned from Him, and had a great many fears and misunderstandings until He appeared to them risen from the dead. They learned more in the forty days from the Resurrection until His Ascension, and then came Pentecost and the Holy Spirit. That was when they received knowledge and the Peace of God from the Spirit that strengthened them to the extent that they did not turn back from any obstacles the world put up in front of them, not even the threat and the reality of martyrdom, which befell many of them.

The gift of peace is a gift of grace. This gift is pronounced on you at the end of each service of Holy Communion. I shall never forget the first time I ever heard that blessing. It was at the first time I ever stayed for the full service of Holy Communion, back in the day when children who had not been confirmed did not take Communion. It seemed to be such a special and true thing to hear of the “Peace of God that passeth all understanding.”, and it is a special thing. I pray that the Peace of God will come upon each of us, dwell in us, and strengthen us so that we shall not turn away from any challenge to the Faith of Jesus Christ. To God alone be the Glory!

AMEN!