

Easter 6C 2010

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

May 8, 2010

John 14:23-29

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives This is something Jesus says during the Last Supper, according to John. It takes John five chapters to describe the Last Supper. It only takes Luke half of a chapter to describe the Last Supper. But Luke his volume two, *The Acts of the Apostles*, in which to describe the Christian community which came into existence after Jesus' resurrection. In John's gospel, all of the instructions and the principles for the Christian community are laid out in advance by Jesus in the Last Supper.

That's why, during this season of Easter, some of our gospel readings strangely go back into the Last Supper. Because the life of the church after the resurrection is described on the night of Jesus' arrest. And so we read this morning that Jesus said: *"I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe."*

Jesus is telling his followers that he is going away. He is going to die and go to be with his heavenly Father. And yet, he tells his followers that he will be with them in a new way. As strange as that sounds to us, we at least know the rest of the story. The disciples, at that moment, had no idea that a crucifixion and an Easter morning were coming.

And so during these five chapters of the Last Supper, we hear so many of our favorite teachings of Jesus.

Love one another.

I am the way and the truth and the life.

I am the vine, you are the branches.

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places.

These tender things are said during on a night of turmoil. Judas walks out in the middle of the meal. Thomas is confused: *"Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"* Jesus predicts that he will be abandoned: *"The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone."*

It is in this atmosphere of turmoil that Jesus speaks some of his kindest words, and some of his greatest promises. Including this one: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.*

I will always remember the moment on September 11, 2001, when I first learned that the United States was under attack. It was the defining moment of this period of American history. Prior to 9-11, there was another event in American history that everyone could remember. My history teacher

sent us home to ask our parents to tell us where they were when they first learned... what? The assassination of President Kennedy.

The assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963. Six weeks before I was born. On this Mother's Day, it's interesting for me to think that my young parents were joyfully anticipating the birth of their first child, and yet the world around them seemed to be shaking. Since high school, I have always known that 1963 was the year of Kennedy's assassination, and I've always known that the 1960's were a decade of upheaval. But I've never really taken a good look at 1963. 1968 is sometimes described as the darkest year of those times, but I have to say that in digging into history, 1963 was a painful year of great upheaval. The assassination of John F. Kennedy was the signal event, but here are some other things that happened that year.

Martin Luther King, Jr., was jailed in Birmingham, and he published his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. Later in 1963, was the march on Washington, and his famous *I Have a Dream* speech. It was in 1963 that we began our boycott of Cuba, which is still ongoing. The Beatles released their first album. The Beatles released their second album. Pope John XXIII— a pope so great that he is one of only three popes that we Lutherans now commemorate on our calendar— Pope John XXIII died, during the middle of the Second Vatican Council, which was itself a revolution for Roman Catholics.

George Wallace was elected governor of Alabama. The government of South Vietnam attacked Buddhist shrines, and tortured Buddhist priests, and th was the government we were supporting, and that initial doubt about Kennedy's Vietnam project would never go away. The famous photograph of the burning Buddhist monk is a product of 1963. Medgar Evers was murdered. It was a really bad year in Mississippi and Alabama. But Mom and Dad and their unborn child were living in Shreveport, where Sam Cooke and his band were arrested for trying to check into a "whites only" motel. He wrote "*A Change Is Gonna Come*," after what happened to him in my hometown three months before I was born.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives." In 1963, Dove of Peace Lutheran Church began. The charter and the formal organization of this congregation took place in that year. *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives."* That's what Jesus said to assure his disciples, less than eighteen hours before the blood and water flowed out of his corpse on the cross.

In the darkest hours, the most unpeaceful of days, while Chet Huntley and David Brinkley and Walter Cronkite were reporting all of these shocking things, in a world gone mad, Christians formed a community called Dove of Peace. *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.* What did the word "peace" sound like in 1963? It must have been a jarring contrast to the world around it.

I remember Miss Hernandez, my high school freshman Spanish teacher, and the horror and the difficulty of learning that Spanish has four words for one English word. We say "you." And Spanish has four words: *Usted, Ustedes, Tu, and Vosotros*. Renaissance English actually had Thou, Thee, You, and Ye, but we threw that out a long time ago. When Jesus says Peace I leave with you,

he is using the plural form of you. (If you follow me.) In the south, it's y'all. Peace I leave with y'all. When Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will teach you and guide you, he doesn't use the singular there, either. The Spirit will teach and guide y'all, the community.

You can't have peace sitting at home watching Walter Cronkite. (Or these days: Glenn Beck and Keith Olbermann and Anderson Cooper and Katie Couric and Diane Sawyer.) *Peace I leave with Y'ALL; my peace I give to Y'ALL. I do not give to Y'ALL as the world gives.* When we come together as the Christian community, that's when we have the peace which the world cannot give.

47 years ago, a community came together— smaller than we are now, much poorer than we are now, without even a building— and in the darkest and most frightening of times, they formed a family that had the peace that the world cannot give. And shared the peace that the world cannot give. And here we are, 47 years later, possessing that peace, and sharing that peace. We don't know much about the future, except that there will be more assassinations, more wars, more tragedies. More disasters, more financial meltdowns, and more terrorist attacks. That much we know. We also know that we have the peace which the world cannot give. And that's why another half century from now, we will still be here, possessing that peace, and sharing it, just as Christ first shared it in the darkest hours of his own journey. Amen.