



Building in Peace

John 14:27, 1 Cor 3:1-15

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

It's easy how different people can see different things in the same words. You'll remember how this week Kilroy was in the news because of an article he wrote about the Arabs. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the issue, the man protested, like a good politician, that his words were misunderstood and out of context.

As we look at this verse that was read to us this evening, we find that Christians interpret it in so many different ways to talk about personal peace, peace with one another and even world peace. As I explored these words this evening I found myself taken on a journey which started here and led me to think of its practical implications for Norfolk and for this part of Norfolk. For me, it has been a reflection on unity that has huge implications for God's church in this land today. Let me read part of the passage again but this time with a bit extra.

26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Peace I leave with you. In many cultures, peace is a fundamental part of greeting and saying goodbye. You bring peace when you meet and depart in peace when you leave. In many of our churches we give each other the sign of peace. I'm a Star Trek fan and you notice how they always say to a new race that they meet - "we come in peace!". It's funny isn't it how all these new civilisations that they found always seemed to speak English too!

Anyway, back to peace. The Jews use the word Shalom for a greeting and salutation and it is assumed that Jesus was giving it in this part of his last evening with His disciples. One commentator describes shalom like this. *Simply translated, shalom means peace." Biblical peace, or shalom, means the existence of right relationships, harmony, wholeness, and completeness. It characterised the ideal relationship between individuals, the community and God. As a result of these right relationships, the community knew security, prosperity, and blessings from God.*¹

Jesus had brought the presence and peace of God into their lives LITERALLY for some three years. Now He was going. You can imagine that that bothered them. Jesus' message is "Don't worry!" (John 14:1). Here Jesus is saying, "I'm leaving my peace with you." How could they have the peace that they had known with Him - it wasn't going to be the same!? The previous verse says it all for them - the Holy Spirit

¹Beasley-Murray, George R., *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 36: John*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher) 1998.

was going to be more than a replacement because He was to be in them rather than just with them bodily. In His death and resurrection, Jesus brought peace with God and that the Holy Spirit brings that peace into us as we accept Jesus into our lives. And that peace that already exists in the Godhead because peace is about relationship and the perfect model of relationship is God Himself, Father Son and Spirit. In God is the perfect example of relational unity. In Him is peace and love and unity of purpose and oneness of being.

And that peace and that relationship is brought into each of our lives by the Holy Spirit. We were all *baptised by one Spirit into one body* (1 Cor 12:13) - the body of Christ, His church. And as His people who are called to be Christ-like, that peace should characterise all those who have His Spirit. And in that body we are called to have the same peace and love and unity of purpose of vision because we are the children of God.

I believe in this new century and at a time when the church of God in Britain is struggling for its existence, we need to know who we are in Christ. It's critical that to we understand that to God, we are special. Peter calls us *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* (1 Pet 2:9) We are His children, His family, His body, His building.

When we talk of unity it's a reality now for all believers wherever you are from and whatever you call your group or denomination. If you are in relationship with the Father through Christ then we ARE one body. NOW.

The trouble is that we often don't live in that reality. We may have found peace with God. We may have found unity of peace with some Christians. But we are rather like a dysfunctional family. We accept a relationship, but we do our own things and live our own separate lives. We have a few family occasions like Christmas when we reluctantly meet our relatives for the festive season and are glad by January that we don't have to see them for another 12 months! But we can't escape the fact that we are related to them. Sad but true. But functional families are great places to be! By and large my family was harmonious as I grew up and it was a great place to be - and a healthy environment in which I could grow into adulthood. God's family is no different.

What I have begun to realise more and more recently is the way in which unity lies at the heart of building church and building God's church. A nation divided against itself cannot stand. If the people of God are disunited the Church will be dysfunctional. It leads to a Christian witness that is unproductive for God and God's people don't grow into maturity. If you don't believe me than just look at the state of the church today in Britain. In many places it is becoming not just dysfunctional but non-functional. People use the words, "dead" or "dying" or just plain "irrelevant". You don't believe me? 92.5% of people in this country think so because they never darken the doorsteps of our churches! There are signs of life and new shoots here and there but we have to accept that in large measure God's church, His body in Britain is in deep trouble - divided, dysfunctional, disunited. That's not true of the Christian faith generally in much of the world where it is growing apace - it just isn't growing here

And what causes division? Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 3. Here was a dysfunctional church that was characterised by division. Some decided to call themselves followers of Paul, others Apollos, others Peter, others Christ. The division was about their inability to get on and the importance they placed on worldly things rather than the peace and unity that comes through being in Christ. Paul was horrified as indeed so would have been Apollos and Peter. Both Paul and Apollos had been instrumental in the foundation of that Church, but as Paul said, it was God's church and God had made it grow. In verse 10 Paul then says this.

And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? ⁴ For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human? ⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. ⁹ For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. ¹⁴ If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

Often we look at this passage in terms of what we build as individuals and that is certainly what is suggested here. But what is the context of it? It was the context of what sort of church they were building at Corinth. Paul was responsible for bringing the foundations - Jesus Christ - and now they were building on it.

They had a choice of materials: Gold, silver, precious stones and wood, hay and stubble. Some of the materials were good, others poor.

Think of what is left of ancient Egypt - structures built out of the finest stone and artefacts made out of gold or silver. What about the houses made out of wood and mud that ordinary people of the time lived in? All gone.

This passage refers to the time when God is going to judge His people and we shall see what we built. And as Paul tells us here, the only things that will last, are things that have eternal worth. The implication is that Paul and Apollos had built with gold silver and precious stones but they were building with wood, hay and stubble - in other words, rubbish. The trouble is that some things just don't last.

So what are those things. Paul helpfully tells us.

Gold silver and precious stones - being like Paul, God's instruments in leading people to Christ, or like Apollos, building up the people of God. And what is it - all things relational. Why? Because Jesus brought us peace with God and the Holy Spirit brings that peace into our lives and our relationships.

Wood, hay, stubble - the low grade stuff. The stuff that was dividing the Corinthians - anything that won't survive eternity. Our denominations - there aren't any! Just the people of God. And what of our buildings? And what of our traditions? What about all the theologies we have fought wars over? What about all the things that still form barriers between us? All gone.

I want to leave you with a challenge this evening. If we are truly in Christ, then we should understand that by His Spirit, we have peace with God but also we should also called to be in peace with those that God has made our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are called to not just to be the body of Christ but to act like it. But that unity is not

one of shaking hands and being chums, but in unity, building God's kingdom here in North West Norfolk. By that I mean building it together. Interceding for this area, seeking God's vision for what He wants to do here together, doing mission together, building one another up. That's gold, silver and precious stones - things that will last for eternity. We are called together to change lives and transform communities. That's where the peace that Jesus left us works dynamically.

That's your future here in Heacham and Hunstanton. It may mean change. It may mean looking at our past and realise we have built with wood hay and stubble as we have hidden behind our denominations and our traditions and not ministered to our community and brought to them life and the peace of Christ. We need to repent of that and covenant together to give Him glory as we move forward in peace and unity to do His will.



*Preached by Mark Reid at St Mary's Heacham
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Scripture Quotations from NRSV*