

"The Peace that Causes Conflict"

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Sixth and last in a series on John 14

John 14.27-31

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Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don't be troubled or afraid.

"You have heard me tell you, 'I'm going away and returning to you.' If you loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than me. I have told you before it happens so that when it happens you will believe.

"I won't say much more to you because this world's ruler is coming. He has nothing on me. Rather, he comes so that the world will know that I love the Father and do just as the Father has commanded me.

"Get up. We're leaving this place.

Common English Bible

Jesus promises peace, makes peace, gives peace.

Peace is *shalom* in Hebrew. When you greet someone, you say, "*Shalom aleichem*," "may peace be upon you." If you speak Arabic it's similar: "*As-salamu alaykum*." Peace, *salam*.

More than our English word "peace," *shalom* fills with meaning. *Shalom* is about how things are in relationship together. *Shalom* is when relationships are whole and well. When relationships are just, and everyone is blessed. When there is trust and mutuality. All our relations — us and God, within our selves, within families, within communities, within all of creation — women and men, trans- and cis-gender, Black, brown, and white. Indigenous and settler, gay and straight. God makes everyone and everything for *shalom*.

The good news of Jesus is *shalom*. Jesus promises *shalom*, makes *shalom*, gives *shalom*.

II

We're finishing up chapter 14 of John's Gospel today. We began with Jesus talking about his *bêt 'ab*. That's Hebrew for "father's house" or "household." The family household, the extended family that lived and worked together, was the basic unit of

Jesus' society (and most societies).

Jesus is talking about God, whom he calls "Father." His "Father's Household" is spacious, with room for everyone. It's Jesus who brings people in. He's getting our places ready and moving us

This isn't just about life after death. We are joining God's family business now. It's living out Jesus' salvation within the life of the whole world and for each person. So Jesus also talks about him and his Father moving in with us.

He introduces us to God the Holy Spirit who is our other comforting, constant Companion and Friend, who sticks-with-us. The Spirit is making God's Household here, in our congregation-community life together.

So we are God's Household of *Shalom*. We are participating in the peace Jesus promises. He is making his *shalom* among us. We can live *shalom* around us.

Sounds good.

But when Jesus' peace moves in, conflict breaks out.

III

It's the way the world is. The world. The *kosmos*.

Kosmos means the whole created universe;¹ that's how we use the word today.² *Kosmos* also means the earth we inhabit.³ *Kosmos* also means us, humankind.⁴ These different senses of the word overlap and intertwine.

Kosmos is not neutral. It has a moral meaning. Most important, the *kosmos* is created by God. The *world* exists because God makes it. God sustains it. And God loves the *kosmos* so much, that in Jesus, God became a human being and set up shop within the *world*. In God's eyes, the *kosmos* is beloved and beautiful.

But the *kosmos* is also hostile and hateful. Jesus shines within the world, but "*the world didn't recognize the light.*" It prefers darkness. Jesus says, "*[the world] hates me because*

¹ For example, in John 17:24 Jesus speaks of the "foundation of the *kosmos*."

² Such as in astronomer Carl Sagan's 1980 book, *Cosmos*.

³ Jesus speaks of a mother's joy at having brought a child into the *kosmos* (16:21), and sending his disciples into the *kosmos* (17:18).

⁴ In 1:10 we're told that the *kosmos* did not know the Word.

I tell the truth, that what it does is evil. "When the world hates you," he says, "know that it hated me first."⁵

This is the world we are born into. Belong to. It is us. This world can respond to God. It rejects God. (Look what happens to Jesus!)

Why?

Jesus knows that the *kosmos* is enemy-occupied territory. He talks about the "ruler of the world." He pictures a malicious Power that has colonized God's good *kosmos*. This Power dominates. It twists and distorts and deceives. It feeds our anxieties and exploits our ambitions. It recruits us (successfully!) seducing us away from God.

This is a bleak diagnosis. A year ago, I'm sure it would have seemed unbelievable to most us. Through for many in the world, this picture is quite credible. It fits what life is like. Maybe after this year, it feels more real to us too.

Picture Jesus' Household of *shalom* moving into this *kosmos*, this really tough neighbourhood. What's going to happen?

Conflict.

IV

Fifty-eight years ago, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. scribbled in the margins of a newspaper one of the most important letters written since St. Paul. Like Paul so often was, King was in jail. He'd been arrested for leading protests against the evils of racial injustice and White supremacy.

In the Birmingham. Alabama city jail, in the paper he'd read a letter from eight white Birmingham clergymen. They were not segregationists. They had taken strong stands, often costly ones, against racial segregation. They were sympathetic moderates. Yet, they deplored the turmoil that King and his allies were stirring up.

Here's part of King's long reply, his *Letter From Birmingham Jail*, read later by King himself.⁶ As you listen, notice how he describes "peace."

⁵ John 1:10; 3:19; 7:7; 15:18. These are just some of the negative references to the *kosmos* in John's Gospel.

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letter_from_Birmingham_Jail. For original materials, including the original transcription of King's letter, audio of King reading it, and the clergymen's letter, see kinginstitute.stanford.edu/liberation-curriculum/lesson-plans/activities/part-three-letter-birmin

I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler [sic] or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

*I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. I had hoped that white moderates would understand that **the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality.** Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.*

∨

"Shalom I leave with you. My shalom I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don't be troubled or afraid."

God loves this *kosmos*, boundlessly. That's why God creates the conflict. To win it back.

Jesus' peace stirs things up, because *shalom* cannot be the absence of tension. Not in the world as it is. When the *Shalom* named Jesus moves into the neighbourhood, there's going to be a ruckus. His is not the "negative peace" that keeps things calm. Jesus' is the "substantive, positive peace," and "the presence of justice."

The world cannot give this peace. It doesn't know how. So Jesus is at work, in us and others.

We continue to travel through Lent, to Jesus' cross, and ours. That's the way of peace, Jesus' *shalom*. So do not be troubled when living as Jesus' people causes trouble.

Certainly do not be afraid. After all, it's the Family business, and we're in the Father's House.