

Palisades Presbyterian Church
Third Sunday of Easter Lent
April 30, 2006

Reflection: "There was never a good war or a bad peace."
- Benjamin Franklin

Readings: Exodus 18: 1 - 12
Luke 24: 36b - 48

Hymns: #602 Benedictus
#401 When Will People Cease Their Fighting
#542 All Praise to Thee My God, This Nigh

Peace be with you...
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The early Christians were not people of standing, but they had a secret power among them, and the secret power resulted from the way in which they were members of one another. —Elton Trueblood, Quaker Professor of Philosophy

Secret power...what do you think. Is faith such a thing? And if so, is it faith that it is the secret power or something else that generates the faith in the way in which we come together?

Let me start with Auguste Comte, the father of sociology, a French philosopher who, around 1856 coined the term *positivism*. The term emerged during the times in response to the inability of speculative philosophy to solve philosophical problems which arose as a result of scientific development.

Essentially, positivists rejected speculation as a means of obtaining knowledge. It said, as I understand it, that if you can't prove it with the sciences – anything solution you will come up with will be arrant nonsense. Secure doubting Thomases of later generations.

Certainly, then, to Comte and his followers – a secret power, as described by Trueblood in the mid-twentieth century, would not be a rational solution to, well, anything....

Yet there are some who have made a scientific study of coming to understand evidence of things that cannot be explained – making the lack of a proof – the proof in itself. In other words, for example, "secret power" is – just as a tree is. It

just doesn't process cognitively in quite the same way. It is at once beyond and within what we know.

If you are beginning to nod off, I understand. I dozed somewhere around here myself, but I will persevere...

In 2005, Rebecca Goldstein wrote a book called Incompleteness. It is a work about Kurt Gödel, the mathematician who in his Sternstunde or shining hour in October of 1930 upset the scientific community with his Incompleteness proof:

Simply he said "One can give examples of propositions which are true but unprovable in the classical system of mathematics."

For any mathematicians in our gathering this morning, two examples he uses are Goldbach's conjecture and Fermat's last theorem.

In other words - the unprovable is not a proof of it's opposite. The inability to disprove God, does not deny God's existence. It would almost be easier, in some ways, if we could empirically prove God or disprove God. In fact, many seek the clarity of either supposition, rather than struggle in the ambiguity.

In the same book, Einstein, who was a contemporary and colleague of Gödel said the following that moves us along this morning's comments into the space; the difficult space of seeking a paradise beyond our ability to know it, believing in what is incomplete to our limited or stultified senses:

It is quite clear to me that the religious paradise of youth, which was thus lost, was a first attempt to free myself from the chains of the "merely personal," from an existence which is dominated by wishes, hopes, and primitive feelings. Out there, there was this huge world, which exists independently of us human beings, which stands before us like a great, eternal riddle, at least partially accessible to our inspection and thinking.

Einstein continues....

The contemplation of this world beckoned like a liberation... The mental grasp of this extra-personal world within the frame of the given possibilities swam as highest aim half consciously and half-unconsciously before my mind's eye... The road to this paradise was not as comfortable and alluring as the road to the religious paradise; but it has proved itself as trustworthy, and I have never regretted having chosen it.

It's the journey... and I think at some point on the road we share, we all just believe. Something happens to convince us that God is and we go with it, doubts and all.

It happened to Jethro in this morning's first reading when he responds to Moses' account of the Exodus from the Egyptians with:

"Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh. ¹¹Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because God has delivered the people from the Egyptians, when they dealt arrogantly with them."

Something just happens that affirms our knowing that God exists and then we begin to accept the limits of empiricism, rationalization, or proofs to explain it. In some ways, we just let go of the arguments and live into a relationship with God that helps us through each and every day, in the company of and service to others.

So, this morning I start from here. From agreeing with Trueblood that we are like the early Christians and there is something here that has to do with the way in which we are one with each other, that we share something that is a source of power and more...unlimited into its hope and promise.

Here we are, gathered in this place, this sacred space, for as many different reasons as there are people here, with one thing, at least, in common. We believe that in some way what we are drawn to or looking for is nurtured and to some degree present here. It may be just a sense of the presence of God in the presence of one another; or the smile on the face of those we love to see each week – around whom a part or more of our lives have become enriched in a way that we would otherwise not be the same.

Raise your hand if you agree! I personally know this to be true!

Some come here seeking energy for healing, resolution to conflict, a particular venue for justice work, truth-telling, or independence from the stifling, containing, institutionalized church that seems so distant from these pews.

This can also be a place where loneliness is dispelled in a flash. There is an unconditional love here that says come as you are, let the God in you greet the God in us: "Namasthe" from the ancient Sanskrit language. Can you feel it? Ask your neighbor, can you feel it?!

And, in the midst of this all there is the presence or better – the reflection of peace. Like light shining through these stained glass windows, the energy of our love and caring for one another reflects the Shekinah in each of us, the glimmering presence of God, touching one another in wonderful and manifold ways.

It is a presence and a peace that is as present and peaceful in times of tribulation as it is in times of joy. It is as Einstein suggests – something before and beyond

what we know, something that is the antecedent and the sequel. The alpha and the omega.

John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you."

When we say "The peace of Jesus be with you, we are saying something much different than the worldly peace of headlines.

A negotiated peace – what in fact does that mean?

A cease fire.

Non-violent resistance

Peace initiatives

Reducing tensions

DMZ

Truce

Armistice

Reduction in troops

Newly formed government

Arms agreements

A worldly peace of headlines that sometimes makes us succumb to the idea that peace will not be complete until

The soldiers are home from Iraq

The genocide in Darfur has ceased

Immigrants are welcomed by earlier immigrants from a different, forgotten time

Iran has ceased enrichment of uranium

Israel and Palestine stop fighting

Governments stop limiting the rights of individuals

Human rights are respected across the earth

The environment is protected

Homeless have shelter

United 93 and the St. of 911 are forgotten

Killing Ends

Honesty runs rampant in our government

More, please – obstacle to peace...

All of these and more must be our attention and our mission. They must or we are the *unbeing dead* of E.E.Cummings.

Peace is our work, our mission. The end to war and atrocities are our direct responsibility and concern. But what peace is this. What peace is attached to all

these things? Is this the peace of “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward all?” Luke 2:14

Or the peace of security councils, international courts, diplomacy, super max prisons, life without parole, don’t ask don’t tell – is it the peace that makes us more comfortable in our gentility or is it the radical Jesus-peace that eclipses anything close to our organized efforts to synthesize it, as if it were ours to tinker with?

Have you ever struggled with the idea that we as a church are not more outspoken? Have you ever felt the conflicting reality of limited energy and resources when faced with the needs of family, friends, congregations even – and the broader worldwide pandemics of violence, fear, mistrust, greed, and the residuals? The powerlessness over suffering, illness, fear...

Have you ever felt as though we need to make peace? Or have you, like I have, come to conclusion that we don’t make it – but we bring it with us and share it, embody it and live it, as the incarnation it is – the gift we have been given: “My peace I give you...” a peace that carried Jesus and other prophets – modern and old – straight into the world, not with solutions first – but the presence of God, the Good News, and a peace that exceeds all understanding.

(Philippians 4:6-7) Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

“The peace of God will guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.” It’s a good thing, because there are times my heart and my mind both want to burst with the incalculable and unconscionable.

There are times I want to scream loudly enough for everyone to hear or softly enough for everyone to listen. There are times when a feeling of insignificance and powerlessness can so overwhelm me in the face of things around me – that I want to run or somehow get away, leave it all behind or buried under something else, so I don’t have to look at it. Simply, my heart and my mind cannot handle the assault of this world upon it.

And nor is it supposed to. The image of God’s peace guarding my heart and my mind, the origin of peace within me – gives me some breathing room when facing the world. It reminds me that it is the Christian tradition in its truest, Jewish form – in the words of a First Century Jew that reminds me that I am not alone but part of one and another, living the peace even in the midst of chaos, knowing that by itself that peace is enough to change the world and to prevent me from self-destructing over the ills and problems around me.

This is not the peace of politicians or pundits, armed forces or even peace movements –

It is a deeper, primal, transcendent peace that emanates from within meeting itself in the world. A permeation of the fabric of the universe by the creative love and energy from which it originated. It is the early and present true language of the heart, the first word before it was spoken. It is the power of God beyond all understanding, love beyond knowing, rest beyond our understanding of that elusive state of being...

It is a place of peace promised by Jesus, who challenged every level of the negotiated world around him with the harmony of the one who sent him. It was the clash of utopia and dystopia – in the inevitable tension of creation on its way, once again, to fusion with its origin. It is like oxygen is to the body – a spiritual requirement to living the Good News.

Peace. Big mysterious, wonderful, exuberant, mighty, steadfast withstanding peace be with you.

It is the recognition of that peace beyond explanation or limitations that feeds the purpose we share in following God in this or other traditions. It *is* a secret power – a secret power of assurance, promise, prayer, and presence that is the foundation and the canopy of the universe in its simplicity and elegance.

Every life here, every life here has made a considerable difference in the lives of others and the world around us. It is so. And, it is more than you will ever know. Look around – could you ever explain to those gathered here the ways in which they have touched your life and changed you? Would they even believe it if you could? Could you imagine living without knowing the people here?

But, alone, separated not just from others but from the peace we have been given to share, the Good News of what God is doing here in this world – without that – for me, at least -- there is every reason to feel discouraged and more by the events of our lives and this world.

Yet, beyond – beyond the frustration we are guarded by peace: a peace that can hold in its palm sadness, disenfranchisement, war, violence and still not be overwhelmed, and all we need to do it to let it be as it is...and carry on. We just need to let it in...and carry on.

Teaching story....

Such is the way of the peace of Jesus. It is omnipresent and as powerful as it is gentle. It is a fingertip thing. The lightest of its touch strikes the brightest of fires.

Give it freely in all ways and know that your minds and hearts are always in its midst, always protected, never alone.

(Isaiah 32:17-18) For the work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. {18} My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places...

Not apart or separated from the world, but in it with the secret power, the one with another, the Good News and the peace that exceeds all understanding... this is the peace, I wish you, as I say: Namaste!

Amen