

LIFE IN ALL ITS FULLNESS



a Place
for Peace

Guest Preacher Chelsea Cornelius

SUNDAY, MAY 22, 2022
COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Sermon for Sunday, May 22, 2022
“A Place for Peace” | Sixth Sunday of Easter
Pastor Chelsea Cornelius | John 14:23-29

John 14:23-29

²³ Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

²⁵ “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 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. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

When I was a kid, from age three to age six, my younger sister and I had our first ever babysitter. Her name was Sarah Holly, and she was this young, kind, fun, funny babysitter that our single-parent mom found for us while she went to work full time, including weekends. So we went to preschool during the week, and Sarah Holly was our babysitter every weekend—for years. And for some reason that I still don’t know, we never just called her Sarah. It was always Sarah Holly. Every weekend we’d get dropped off at Sarah Holly’s house – a big stone house in a beautiful neighborhood, with a long stone walkway up to her front door.

And inside her house she had a fancy living room with a fireplace, and up a winding wooden staircase there were hallways and bedrooms; we were not allowed in her bedroom which always made it seem so mysterious and so cool. The house had a small kitchen with lots of cupboards, and a fenced in backyard with ivy growing along the gate. And each day we had different activities: Sometimes we'd play dress up; I loved putting the big fluffy pink boa scarf around my neck and a crown on my head. In the winter we'd put on our one-piece snowsuits and play outside; in the summer we'd walk to the movie theater where her friend Todd worked at the ticket box. And when we were at her house passing the time, we'd play a game called "find the thimble"- which sounds like what it is - Sarah Holly would hide a thimble in her home and we'd spend the day trying to find it. Thrilling, I know.

We loved Sarah Holly, and she loved us. My mom still has framed photos from some of our adventures, gifted to my mom for Mothers' Day and Christmas. The only day of heartbreak I ever felt in Sarah Holly's care was the day my mom told us that Sarah Holly was going to be moving away. That she was going to college and couldn't be our babysitter anymore. *What do you mean, leaving? Now what?* In our child minds Sarah Holly was going to be ours forever.

We continue in our Easter series this week – "Life in All its Fullness" - when we ask, in this season of light, and hope, and celebration: What does it look like to be Easter people? To truly believe and live as though we have been given the gift of life in abundance? Especially when life does not feel abundant, or secure, or safe, or joyful all the time (and not just when our childhood babysitters go to college).

But it's true: Our lives, our city, and our world are filled with so much heartache and unknown – wars abroad and the terrors of our own nation; debates on bodily autonomy and disasters of policy; the frustration and danger of unending gun violence; the crisis of production shortages that leave babies without food and families without resources. And then we have our own lives and marriages, work and children, illness, stress, and traumas that need tending to. Sometimes I ask myself: How can this all be real? When will any of this get better? It just all seems a little untenable all at once.

Our scripture reading today takes us to another story of overwhelm and anxiety and grief. It's before Jesus' resurrection on Easter and it's before his death on Good

Friday. The story we read is part of Jesus' "farewell discourse" (or, goodbye conversation) the night before his death. It's also the lectionary passage for today, so people in worship all over the world are reading this story today. Why? Why, in Easter, are we going back?

The story is when Jesus starts to explain to his disciples all that is about to happen (that he's going to the Father, and that they'll stay here, but the Holy Spirit will come down to be with them on their journey helping them to remember everything Jesus said and did). Jesus is saying goodbye, preparing his followers for a future where he is not walking by their side.

And the disciples have a lot of questions and a lot of anxiety about this. So they ask him: "Lord where are you going?" "Why can't I follow you there?" "We don't know where you are going, how can we find the way?" Basically, "How is this all going to work?" "What do you mean you're leaving us"¹

After all this time of teaching, and preaching, healing, and praying, and resting and eating together and probably also just palling around together, playing "find the thimble," Jesus is saying goodbye. So they're anxious, afraid, and grieving and they don't yet totally understand.

But in all their worry and uncertainty, he offers them a great gift in his final days. He says, "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."²
Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.

Do you ever wonder why we show signs of peace to one another every Sunday?

We just did it a little while ago. We did our confession, and then I said *May the peace of Christ be with you!* And you said, *And also with you!* And then we shared signs of peace. What's this about--this funny little back and forth in the middle of our worship? It's not to have a little stretch break, or to make all the introverts uncomfortable.

¹ See John 13:21;30; 13:36-38; also John 14:5-22.

² John 14:27

But think about it: Every single week, as part of our worship, no matter what's going on in our lives or in our world, we get up and offer each other words and signs of peace: A handshake, a hug, a look of appreciation and kindness to your neighbors. Those of you who watch online type out little messages of peace; and from near and far we're doing this rustling around thing of greeting one another and touching one another with offerings of peace. Maybe it's exactly *because* of what's going on in our lives and our world that we have this practice of sharing peace.

Because when we do this, we are all reenacting and remembering that Jesus, too, offers this same reconciling, loving peace. Not just when he is saying goodbye, but it happens again in his resurrection too. A few chapters later when the disciples are gathered together in those days after the empty tomb, wondering what to make of it all, Jesus shows back up to his disciples in that first encounter, he greets them again with peace:

He stood among them and said *"Peace be with you."*

He showed them his wounds.

They recognized him and rejoiced.

And he says again, "Peace be with you."³

And so we, too, practice exchanging that same peace.

When Sarah Holly went to college, I was upset. And I will confess that my sister and I were not always kind to the babysitters that followed in her footsteps, we did not often greet them with peace. I think part of me hoped she'd quit college, come back, and we'd all be like Peter Pan, never growing up. I had hopes for some big change, a flash and everything would be fixed and we would be okay.

But it wasn't anything flashy or quick that made us okay. It was the little stuff—the photos we kept hanging in the hallway, my mom's kindness in understanding our sadness, our laughter, the fact that my sister and I experienced this together. All of

³ John 20:19b-21

this small stuff, these places of comfort and peace, made my 6-year-old sadness bearable.

So then how do we face hard truths, sometimes unbearable truths, and trust that we'll be okay? How do we face the truth of loss, or illness, or grief, or hurt, or death and trust that our hearts will mend, that this isn't the end of the story? It turns out, we can't look up at our mothers, or scream up at God or the universe and say "mend my heart!" "fix this mess!"

Because being okay, bearing the unbearable, doesn't happen in grand slams and big flashes. It happens in every small exchange, every passing of peace. What helps when we're depleted? It's not a big flash of change that saves us and the world; it's the tiny acts of love and justice and kindness every day. It's not powerful speeches or new years resolutions or big promises, but our everyday exchanges of saying: *peace be with you, good morning, I'll help you, how are you, I'm with you, I see you, bless you, thank you, I love you.* Jesus doesn't walk out of the tomb on Easter morning to a cheering crowd and flashing lights and the truth of love revealed, but he quietly shows up for his friends, greeting them with peace.

When we are depleted, or sad, or angry, or exhausted, we do well to help each other take it one day at a time. We do well to sing like it's Easter even when it feels like Good Friday outside. We do well to share signs of peace as often as we can. And like hiding a thimble in a big old house, there are so many small places for peace.

Thanks be to God. Amen.