
Peace in the Midst of Hostility

A sermon by CanonCarolynne Williams

The third Sunday after Pentecost

Year A

Romans 7:15-25a

Gospel: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

It is not always easy for the preacher to start out on a light note. This particular text from Matthew does not make it any easier. This scripture causes one to study and exegete the passage until every word is understood. After the frame work of the sermon is in place, it still is, sometimes, a sermon that one has uneasiness about. So this is where I stand.

"Come to me, all that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

I believe this passage of scripture. I actually digest these words and sometimes walk with them. I turn these words over in my mind.

The uneasiness comes when I know, in my heart, that they are true and I want to share with others, but holding these words in an embrace is a trade off. The trade off comes every time there is a circumstance of life and I believe that all will be well, especially when it comes to having inner peace. My thoughts become a conversation with God where I can only hear my voice. The conversation where I can only hear myself goes something like this, "Alright God, I am trusting you and believing through faith that all will be well. Now hurry up God and fix this. And when you are reminding me, God, that this is going to be okay, give me inner peace in the midst of this. I believe what this passage says: Your yoke is easy and your burden is light, God."

Peace, especially inner peace, during these times of life evolving seems to be elusive.

When these words were spoken to the people in Chorazin, two and a half miles north of Capernaum, Jesus was serious. He was basically saying, you can have divine freedom and live your life and not worry or fret or be filled with anxiety, but there is going to be a trade off. If they dared to trust him when he said, "let me carry that burden for you," not only would their burden be lighter and their yoke easier, but they could depend upon this promise being passed on to the next generation and the next generation and the next.

I was in a meeting the other day of fellow clergy and lay folk from around the Diocese. We were building community by sharing something about ourselves. The gentleman sitting across from me was from North Georgia and said that he could trace his ancestors back ten generations. I thought to myself well, that is nice. I began to speculate, in my mind, about his ancestors and assumed in a judgmental manner from my own prejudices, that there would not be any peace extended from me, because I assumed that his ancestors would not extend peace to me.

I then realized from my heart that I was wrong. I was wrong all the way around, because I was putting a burden upon my own shoulders that wasn't even there from this man. I was convicted in my heart that I was wrong. I hoped that his ancestors were good people without prejudices. I was judging the gentleman across the table from me based simply on what he had said.

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; For I am gentle and humble of heart."

Citizens of this country who move about on American soil routinely are subjected to scrutiny and surveillance because of the attacks of 9/11 and threats to national security. We are reminded of the full emergence of a complex challenge to the national security of the United States. We live and move and have our being in ways that we don't want to embrace just to remain good citizens.

The celebration of the founding of this nation brings about acknowledgement, recognition and honor. Those who fought and died protecting this country carried heavy burdens in the midst of seeking peace and liberty. For some the burden was not easy and the yoke was not light. The potential is ever present for goodness and mercy to prevail because we are told in the book of Matthew that God is gentle and humble in heart and we will find rest for our souls.

In 2011 our manner of living does not imply that we do not have faith in God. What our recent history does say is that in seeking, regaining and retaining the ever present desire to be at peace, all sorts of measures are adhered to. They are sought and put into place. The walls of defense are defined and redefined. We, as citizens of the United States and carriers of the faith in which we have been baptized are ever seeking and claiming the grace that is there for us.

At times peace seems indefinable. And even though "this place of peace" seems "hard to pin down", we as citizens, we as faith subscribers look for the place to stand in the midst of the potential walls that divide us and pull us away from community.

The wall of division exist between countries, and in some instances rightfully so. These walls of division exist on levels of living and working and praying and being. However, in the midst of the walls of division that we encounter in our daily living, there is a place that is called a place of peace. This place of peace comes through the uniting of the body of Christ for all who desire this symmetry.

In the early church Paul's anguish over the fate of fellow Jews who did not accept Jesus as messiah was very apparent. "Paul concluded that Jewish disbelief had opened the way for non-Jews."

Through Christ and the love of God for all people, the barriers between people who were on opposing sides of the covenant were brought together.

Christ proclaimed peace to all of God's people and the walls of hostility, the barriers of separation were diminished. Everyone who had a stake in seeking peace recognized and accepted the very present fact of having access to God.

Having access to God is comforting. The people of Israel and the people of this world today can have peace. In the desire to live in the freedom of God's love, the driving force which is permeated through and through by the presence of the Holy spirit is foundational from God.

It is the center of seeking, gaining and having peace within. If faith centered in Christ is not first and foremost, the walls of division become terminal.

How are we encouraged today to have inner peace, sometimes, in the midst of conflict? We are encouraged to come to God's table and receive refreshment. We are invited to come to the table. The presence of God's love for all will bring refreshment and renewal.

The embrace of inner peace is ever present. How do we know this? When we reach to connect with the presence of the almighty, a sense of calm prevails. This calm and rest prevails in the midst of whatever may be happening.

Where there is hostility the walls of hostility are eventually crumbled when peace is sought. Sometimes it takes scores of years. Sometimes one generation hands the mantle over to the next. Through it all faith in God continues to sustain us and the face of reconciliation will prevail. "The peace of empires is not true peace". True peace is found in the prevailing presence of God. Always. God is a loving benefactor offering all people a stake in salvation.

The preaching of this text causes me to really reflect on God's yoke being easy and asking God to carry the concerns of my heart so they will be lighter. Yet, I am still reminded that I have to be open to God's grace and wisdom that God has given to me and to you, from one generation to the next. As my grandfather, the preacher, use to say. Just keep on living. Wake up and look around you. You will eventually trust God, completely and succinctly. When you do all else will cease to trouble you.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest".

Enjoy the 4th of July. Celebrate and give thanks.

Amen.