
Peace Give I To You

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler
Atlanta, Georgia
The Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year C**

*Peace give I to you.
Peace give I to you.
Not as the world gives, give I to you.
Peace give I to you.*

Those were the words I sang thirty years ago on the beaches of California. What fun it was! That was my summer job. I was working during the summer for First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, California, where Lloyd Ogilvie was the senior minister. I used to sit and listen to his sermon for almost an hour, so deep and mesmerizing was his voice. (He later became chaplain of the senate).

Yes, that was my summer job. I was actually given a stipend by Hollywood Presbyterian Church to live in a small room with three guys at the beach, and to lead Bible studies and youth groups on the beach of Catalina Island.

I played guitar for those groups on the beach, and I learned a lot that summer. There were lots of bronze and muscular bodies around me in those days. My own body has never been bronze and muscular, but I sure saw a lot of them then, playing beach volleyball in the background of our Bible Studies.

I sang this song: "Peace give I to you. Not as the world gives, give I to you. Peace give I to you."

But it was a tough summer. First of all, the three of us guys had problems. Our room was tiny. There was no room for any dresser or drawers; we kept our clothes and bags under each of our beds. We walked a boardinghouse hall to get to the bathroom. Two women were also working with us, and they lived on the floor above us. We were supposed to be a team, working together, so that we could help youth on the beaches of California.

But we spent a lot of time trying to figure each other out. We spent a lot of time keeping peace among ourselves, and learning about Christian community. "Peace give I to you," we sang, but we did not always know what that meant.

Those words, "Peace give I to you," are taken from this lovely gospel story we have heard this morning, from John, chapter fourteen.

Jesus is about to leave this earth. He is in the upper room, at the last supper, with his disciples. He is delivering his final words. And he claims to give his disciples peace. It is a grand and lovely promise. But listen to what he says about his peace. He says it is a different kind of peace. It is not a peace like "the world" gives.

Jesus mentions "the world" frequently, and I need to clarify what he means here. Sometimes when Jesus says "the world," he means it in a positive sense. There are elements of the world that are good. It is a mistake for Christians to think that the Bible always treats the world as bad.

Consider, for instance, one of the most widely quoted scriptures in the Bible, John 3.16. "For God so loved the world that he sent his son into the world, not to condemn the world but so that the world itself might be saved."

God actually loves the world. It says so right there in scripture.

But there is another sense that Jesus sometimes uses "the world." He contrasts the ways of the world, with the ways of God. The way of the world is not always bad; it is just not the way of God.

This is the way Jesus uses the word today. Peace give I to you. Not as the world gives, give I to you. Peace give I to you.

There is a difference between the peace of God, and the peace of the world. What is the difference?

For one, the peace of God is beyond understanding. Whenever my mother used to ask her father what he wanted for Christmas, my grandfather had one reply. "All I want is the peace of God which passes all understanding."

What a joy that would be! Peace that passes understanding!

In the world, peace generally means simply the absence of conflict. God's peace is more positive, more constructive. It is not just the absence of war. It is the constructive presence of joy and justice. Joy and justice give me peace. I am at peace when I know that people are actively enjoying the goodness and the gifts of other persons.

The peace of God is not just the result of some political calculus. That is the way of our ten-year-olds. If you stay on your side of the car, and you do not say such stupid things any more, and if you keep your music to yourself, then we will have peace together.

Jesus comes not only to take away conflict and war. Jesus comes to inspire us to be joyful and just people; joy and justice bring peace! This is the foundation of peace in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Peace means wholeness. It means being truly well. Shalom!

Anybody seen the movie, *Troy*, yet? It is Brad Pitt who has the bronze and muscular body in that movie! Better than the ones I used to see. He plays the role of Achilles, the magnificent barbarian who helps to overthrow the city of Troy. But when you see this movie this summer, or this fall, or later on DVD, remember what these Greek stories were about. Those ancient stories were often about the search for peace.

Much of the philosophical searching behind these stories is the search for peace. What is peace for Homer and Euripides? They are trying to describe peace as the world gives. Peace is the absence of war, or the violent enforcement of calm behavior. Later, in ancient Rome, peace was always an enforced peace. The great Pax Romana depended upon strong military enforcement.

But Christianity offers another sort of peace, quite different from the ancient Greek concept. True peace is not just the absence of war, or the absence of conflict. True peace does not need to be enforced with the ways of the world. And the peace of God can be with us no matter what else is occurring in the world.

There is always something else occurring in the world. For me, there were three guys and two girls trying to learn about Christian community. There were beach volleyball games and bronze hard bodies. At that time, the smell of war was still in the background, too, the Viet Nam War.

I realize there is war today. And there are folks thinking that if only their bodies were in shape, they would have peace. There are families in pain and tension. There are people studying the ancient Greek texts and putting them on film. Troy!

But whoever you are, and wherever you are, and wherever the world is today, But Jesus offers us another sort of peace. It is a peace that passes our understanding. We cannot produce it, or enforce it, or even totally understand it. Instead, it emerges in our Godly community. Peace blossoms when God's people gather to worship, gather to sing and to study, and

gather to genuinely love one another. When we act morally, when we genuinely love in the name of Jesus. When we dare to sing and to learn together, we have something that the world cannot give!

The peace of God means that God has blossomed in our deepest places and has made us whole and well. God loves you. You, you, you! You do not need to strive for attention or power or your side of the car. The peace of God starts in our hearts.

Then, the peace of God spreads to the people you know the best: your families and households. Care for them. Appreciate their gifts and joys, their cares and concerns. Build constructive care with them. With that divine love comes the peace of Jesus.

Not as the world gives, give I to you. Peace, my perfect peace, I give to you.

AMEN.

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