

Calvary United Methodist Church
May 26, 2019

THE PEACE JESUS PROMISES
Rev. Dr. A. Robert Cook

Children's Message:

John 14:23-29

I'll ask that the kids come forward and we'll share a time with our kids. I need two actors. Do you think you could be an actor today? Okay. So, sit up here. And you two sit side by side. Okay.

There once was a lady who had to take a plane someplace and she got to the airport and her flight was delayed and she was hungry. So she bought some cookies. Put some cookies there. Here's your flight bag. Now, she sat down to wait for her plane and she got hungry, so she opened her bag of cookies...open your bag of cookies and have a cookie. She was hungry. Do you like those cookies? Okay, have a cookie. Now, while she is sitting there, the man waiting for his plane next to her reached in the bag and he took a cookie. And she thought: oh, my goodness! He took one of my cookies without asking. Can you make a mad face? Give it a try. A pouty face? Well, she didn't say anything, but she just reached in because it was her bag of cookies and she took another cookie. Have a cookie. Well, he smiled. Can you smile at her? And so he took a cookie. She was furious. Can you put a furious face on? Okay. Well, so she took another cookie. Have another cookie. And then the man smiled at her...smile, you are doing good. And he took a cookie. Have another cookie. Well, she was really angry. Are you sure you can't put an angry face on, a pouty face, a mean look? Can you give the man a mean look? Okay, then he reached in, have a cookie, it's all acting, or you can use that one, and it was the last cookie, so he broke it in half, go ahead and break that cookie in half, perfect, and give her the big piece. And then he smiled and his flight was called. So, go over here because your flight just got called. She was so...put your hands on your hip and get really pouty. No? Okay. Well, then her flight was called and she took the bag and she crumpled it up, I'll just give it to you, and she threw it away and she picked up her flight bag, right? She walked to the plane, she got in the plane, she got in the seat and she thought she'd take out a book. Take out a book. Remember it is acting and you have to act. But when she reached into her bag, what else did she find in her bag? That was not her bag of cookies the man was taking from...that was his bag of cookies and she was all angry because she thought he was eating her cookies and he is on the same flight and he is going to smile at her again. Oh, she felt so embarrassed because she was eating his cookies. Wow, would you be embarrassed if that really happened to you? A little bit.

Well, look. Sometimes things aren't what they seem. Sometimes we don't always get what is really going on and we get mad over things that people are doing and not thinking about it and we just, well there is a word for this. We assume stuff. And sometimes we are wrong and sometimes you just have to understand that you can be wrong and it is okay because this nice

guy smiled at you because you are a very pretty girl. You do like pretty girls? Yeah, right answer, ok. Which means that you have to take a little bit more time and think about what's going on and not jump, but just be patient. And patience is good for all of us, right?

Okay, we'll let's pray. Lord, thank you that you help us through all our mistakes and sometimes our assumptions and all these things and help us always to be patient and wait for you. Bless our kids. In Christ, Amen.

Okay, well there is another bag of cookies you could share. Do you think you could all share these? Would you have your fill of Vanilla Wafers? Apparently you can share these with your sister and there are a couple more for you to share with your sister. And you can have some fruit snacks too.

Thank you, guys.

Message:

Please join me in a word of prayer: Dear Lord, guide us today. We've come here to worship you, to hear from you, to lift our voices in song, to bow ourselves in prayer, but to hear your Word and to let your Word change and transform us. So guide us. May the words of my mouth and meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I have a friend who is a professional Gnome. He is an artist. He is a storyteller. He's a folksinger. He dressed like a gnome. He's 5 foot 9. He has a big tall pointy hat, carries a staff with a gnome carved into it. He has a business called Gnome Countryside down in Lancaster County and he's been pretty successful, actually and that's him up there.

Now, he's been a juvenile diabetic since the age of 14. He is now 76. He has never spent a day in the hospital due to diabetes. Those who have diabetes know, especially if you are insulin dependent, just how difficult it is to manage this. But he eats well, he exercises regularly. He monitors his insulin with precision. He is dealing with the diabetic retinopathy now at this age, but he tells me he plans to live to be 104 because he loves the 104th Psalm. That is his Psalm.

He's led camps for diabetic kids for the Cleveland Clinic for many many years. This Camp Ho Mita Koda has been in business...well, you can see the sign, 1929. He tells me that the hardest thing to teach teens is the importance of obedience and discipline to their diet, exercise and medications. Kids don't want to do that. They see someone eating sugary snacks, drinking the soda, they want sugary snacks, they want a soda. They want to eat cheese puffs, they want to eat whatever because that's kind of a deal. But if the diabetes they have is going to be managed and if they are going to have a healthy life, then obedience is the price that you have to pay to be healthy.

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus is with his closest friends in the upper room. This is where the Last Supper takes place, as I have said. Everyone is nervous. They are waiting just for the worst to happen. A lot of tension in the air. For them that means arrest, imprisonment, torture, maybe death. Jesus knows the worst will happen, but to him. And despite knowing what lies ahead, he wants to comfort them and he wants to focus their attention so that they are prepared and ready. They are not doing this well. He shares with them that he is going to go away. He has a work to do, but it will come out right because God is in this and God is with him. He will not leave them as orphans. Now, there were two Judas in his band of disciples. One was Judas Iscariot and Judas who is called not Iscariot. And Judas not Iscariot says: How? How does this all work? He speaks for the confusion that everyone is feeling around the table.

So, Jesus says: If anyone will love me, keep my word, my Father will love them and will come to them and we will make our home with them.

Now, Judas was expecting a concrete answer, this is how it works: Point A, B, C, whatever. But Jesus is going to take them in a completely different direction, because it is not logical, it is a mystery. And death will take him away, resurrection will transform him and his relationship with them. And Jesus may not be seen by the world as he was up to that point, but after, he will be seen through the lives of his followers, which is the way it is today. His followers then are to love him by staying close and obeying his commandments.

The discipline of obedience is what holds them close to Jesus and close to one another. We don't like the word obedience, but if you are on any kind of medication, so far I am only on one, but obedience to that is what makes me healthy. They are to obey his teaching, to wash one another's feet, to serve one another without condition, to love a neighbor regardless of who that neighbor is and their feelings about them, to serve all people. And Jesus was very clear that his way is the way of non-violence.

That will be underscored later that night when there in the Garden of Gethsemane soldiers come along with Judas Iscariot and Peter will grab a sword and he is going to aim at the high priest's servant. He's not just playing with it, he's playing for keeps, but it is a glancing blow, cuts off the ear of Melchus, the high priest's servant. Jesus picks up the ear, heals the man and then he blasts Peter for using unwarranted violence because God's way is not violent. What Jesus will show them is that God's way is the way of the cross: suffering, sacrifice.

There are those who profess to find Jesus in their lives every day and what they find is as they grow closer by obeying his way he manifests his presence to them by the power of the Holy Spirit. And that presence then brings us great sense of peace, the ongoing experience of peace that really doesn't happen any other way.

I know this text is often misinterpreted. Some think it's enough to profess to love Jesus, but you know, I mean, the commandments, I won't do that, you know, not really necessary. After all, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. You know, he's going to love us no matter what. Well, he will, but he asked if you want his peace, this is what you do.

Another way is to profess to love him but not try to live out way, not try to live out what it means. Another way is then to go opposite and try to keep the commandments like they are some kind of a check list, but then it becomes a duty and there is not love to that. There is just sort of this disciple of hardness and that's when you start pointing the finger at other people who aren't living like you.

The Christian faith was never about blind obedience and never will be.

Now, as I said, those of us who follow a regimen of medication or diet, exercise, to maintain health, understand that our obedience to what our physician has commanded us brings freedom. If we love our body, we take our meds, we exercise, we eat right, stable health, freedom. It's not a drudge, really. The disciple of obedience actually brings a lot of freedom.

So, too, obeying Jesus' commands draws us nearer to the heart of God and others will see our healthy, honest spirituality by the way we live out what Jesus has commanded us. And the fruit of that is this great sense of peace, the peace of Christ which the world cannot duplicate not can it take away.

Now, the very word that Jesus used in his own native language is the Hebrew word for peace, Shalom. And Shalom means more than the absence of conflict or some warm fuzzy feeling or sitting in a meadow on a spring day. Shalom in Hebrew means wholeness, completeness. We long for wholeness in this fragmented world that is really at war with itself. This is the peace that Jesus gives, that you can walk through the most difficult places in life and find his peace is with you. And the price of this peace is our obedience.

He does not offer a life without hardship.

And as Jesus makes these promises to his friends, he is on his way to the cross. And his disciples will soon face opposition from very powerful enemies who will seek to kill them and will kill almost all but one, I believe. But Christians have faced opposition and still face opposition and persecution in a lot of places. And we saw that last month when on Easter Sunday dreadful bombings in churches in Sri Lanka killed hundreds of people and injured hundreds more. They are rebuilding their churches now. I saw some video footage of that this week. And they are grieving, and yet they feel Jesus' comforting presence very near, nearer than before. And often it is through the harder times of life that we grow deepest.

So, I have to ask: have you experienced the peace of Jesus? Have you ever experienced it? It is a gift. It doesn't depend on how well you act or perform, just simply staying close, obeying his command. It doesn't depend on how well the earthly powers, earthy family or

friends are treating you or getting along. It has nothing to do with that. It cannot be dampened by the feelings of others or by someone else doing whatever to you. It isn't affected when things don't go your way. That's what makes the peace of Jesus so amazing, so divine, so worthy of our time and our attention and our obedience. That's why Paul says later on: Let the peace of Christ rule your hearts, since as member of one body you were called together to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

That word is what gives us the impetus to follow, to obey, to say: Yes, Lord.

Have you never experienced the peace of Christ? And if so, what is blocking that? I can't answer that question for you, I can only do that for myself, but generally it points at some place where we need to do the kind of inner work where God's Spirit takes away the blocks that hinder the flow of his loving spirit. And the answer that you are seeking may well be found in hearing and trusting and obeying what Jesus is asking of you. Obedience—loving obedience actually is what removes all of those obstacles.

So, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts by letting the word of Christ dwell richly in you and don't be surprised then when these peaceful moments comes, even in the craziest of days. Amen.