

“My Peace I Give To You”

- I. “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.” Jesus’ words are part of his High Priestly Prayer in which he both asked God to sustain his closest followers and invited these same followers to venture more deeply into the gift of reconciliation and peace that he yearned for them to have. Part of why I love Jesus Christ so much is because at a time when it might have been more natural for him to focus on his own needs, he instead prayed for his followers. In fact, he had every reason to be annoyed with them the night before he was to die. They were going to bail on him big time. He knew that, but instead of being angry with them, he actively demonstrated his love by washing their feet. Jesus was and continues to be a lover of souls. I have never found him to be untrustworthy, even when I have made a royal mess of my promises to him.
- II. When I try to comprehend and tap into the love of Christ and the peace Christ gives to me, my insights are often transitory and hard to hang onto. But one way that I can grasp a tiny part of this love is by pondering the notion of constancy. Constancy is the characteristic of Christ that makes him the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Constancy casts out fear and allows us to experience peace even in challenging situations. It frees us to have the peace that passes all understanding. Psychologists have written extensively about object constancy and its importance in developing inner balance and ensuring healthy development. Our parent or caregiver is there consistently to soothe us, feed us, teach us, and limit us. As time passes we learn through repeated interactions that we can rely upon another to respond to us in a way that is not predominantly self-serving or unpredictable. We learn that our caregiver will hear our specific voice, will be able to tell the difference between a hungry cry, a wet diaper cry, and a cry when we become frightened. Jesus as the Good Shepherd is the model of constancy who allows us to live without fear.
- III. When I search for the images and experiences that most closely approximate the constancy that Christ offers, I find that I focus on the key women God has sent into my

life. Many have told me that the women in their lives – their grandmothers, mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters -- have provided them with deep constancy. Men, please give me a break – your contributions are significant, and I would never want to suggest that you and I are unimportant in our relationships with others. But it was the women who stayed with Jesus at the cross; the women who went to anoint Jesus' body on Easter morning; the woman at the well who is thought to be the first Christian missionary when she went and called her village to meet Jesus; and it was Mary Magdalene who is known as the Apostle to the Apostles.

- IV. So this morning, this Mother's Day, I want to share some specific ways that God has demonstrated constancy to me through women in my life. My paternal grandmother, Mariah, came from a family with considerable wealth, all of which was lost during the depression. She died as a result of caring for my aunt who had tuberculosis. I was only four at the time. My clearest memory of her is one visit when I was running throughout her house, turning the lights off and on. My parents tried to stop me and she said, "No, leave him alone." She looked at me with great affection – how that is etched in my mind. Random? No, she had connected with my explorative, energetic nature and for a brief time made her home a safe place for me. She was a good Methodist whose favorite hymn was "The Old Rugged Cross."

My other grandmother, Trella May, came from a small town in the interior of Southern New Jersey, a town that no longer exists. She was the oldest of seven children whose mother died at an early age. In third grade, she had to drop out of school to raise her siblings and as a result, she could barely read or write. She suffered for some years because my grandfather was an alcoholic and worked seven day a week as a hotel chambermaid. But every year at Easter she made sure I had a pair of new shoes. Some days after grammar school I would go to visit her and we would talk for hours. When I went away to college, each Tuesday a painstakingly written four-page letter was in my mailbox. Enclosed were two one-dollar bills, which I quickly used to buy a cheeseburger. How long it had taken to write those letters I will never know. I do know she loved me. She was also a Methodist too, and her favorite hymn was "In the Garden."

I met Peg's maternal grandmother, Mrs. Taylor, when Peg and I married in 1970. She lived in Morristown and had traced her ancestry to before the Mayflower. I'd never known anyone whose family had a coat of arms hanging in her home. But it's not the coat of arms that I remember about Mrs. Taylor. It was that she sized up pretty quickly that as a young couple we were struggling financially; she gave us a generous

check to buy a washer and dryer. She warmly welcomed me into the family and wrote to us frequently. We gave our daughter her middle name, Louise.

There are so many other women to mention – my mother who used my father's life insurance money to put my sister and me through school; my sister, who in the last six months of her life taught me about forgiveness and reconciliation and from whom I learned much about healing as one dies; Peg's mother, who remembers and makes my favorite cake for me and always sends me Christmas and birthday gifts that convey that she has given thought to what I might want or need. From my daughter I have learned that the next generation can reflect back to us what we taught them and hold us accountable to be who we asked them to be. Then, there's Peg herself, who has taught me how a marriage is sacred, like the relationship between Christ and his church. She is to be commended for marrying me.

IV. Conclusion. Our faith is based upon the Incarnation. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. Our faith is not an abstract, difficult to grasp philosophical system; it is not only a compilation of profound teachings by a prophet and a wise man. Our faith is dynamically rooted in relationships, which at their core should mirror our relationship with Jesus Christ. We are told in today's Gospel that Jesus and the Father are one and that we are invited to participate actively in that relationship. We are also told that Jesus will send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to help us enter into the relationship between the Father and the Son. This is not abstract, far away stuff. This is not pie in the sky. This is the Incarnation lived out in our life-long relationships. My grandmothers and mother taught me about Christ, prayed for me, and kept the lights on when I wandered away from home. They lived their faith in their actions, and I experienced Christ in their unconditional love for me. Their courage to face many challenges, to find peace in spite of adversity helped me see that peace comes not from worldly achievement, but rather from constancy in my relationship with Christ. Memories of the past have blended with experiences of the present and help me understand the way in which Christ's constancy has passed from one generation to the next. Thank you mothers, thank you grandmothers, thank you sisters, wives, and daughters for being Christ to us, for giving us images of Christ's constancy that have sustained us. Amen.