

Peace in Trouble

John 14:23-31

One of the most common questions we ask to find out someone's outlook on life is, "What do you think of when you see a glass that's only partly full?" Is the glass half empty or half full? The optimist, of course, will say that it's half full. The pessimist will say that it's half empty. The engineer will say the glass is too big. The scientist will say that it's all full – you just need to define what it's full of. The cynic wonders who drank the other half. The waitress comes over and fills it up. And the true optimist wonders whose paying for the next round.

What about you? How do you see the glass? Or, more importantly, how do you see your life? Is your life half full, or half empty? Or is it more than that? Are you totally filled, or totally empty? Maybe the warmer weather has filled you up with joy, the summer has filled you with new possibilities, a new relationship fills you with joy, and you're blessed to overflowing. Or maybe you're empty. Maybe you've got too much month at the end of your money. Maybe you feel like you're running on empty. Maybe you're drained from watching the news and hearing of more school shootings, of inflation, of the pandemic, of more politicians passing the blame for all of the problems. Or maybe it's just the everyday drain of busyness. What that shows us is that our troubles drain us. Peace, though, fills us. Troubles drain. Peace fills.

This is yet another passage from Jesus' final words to his disciples in the upper room on Maundy Thursday. He's preparing them for what is to come. He's preparing them for all that's going to happen over the next few days; his arrest, trial, crucifixion and resurrection. He's preparing them for when they will flee, deny, and hide. He's preparing them for a time of trouble. He's preparing them for trouble by showing the peace he has even as he knows

what's coming for him. He's preparing them for trouble by giving them peace.

If the disciples had known the trouble that was coming for Jesus, they would probably try to comfort him. But as it was, Jesus himself comforted his disciples because he was going away—to the cross. Jesus comforted them: "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." Jesus had to go away, had to face trouble, but that wouldn't be the end. They would see Jesus again. He would return. And the disciples should rejoice because Jesus' departure into death would result in a glorious resurrection and return to life, that all people might believe and be saved. Only by leaving could he return. Only by dying on the cross could he win "the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation" for you and me. His death is our life. His end is our beginning. His troubles bring us peace.

More than that, Jesus knows that his disciples will need someone to be alongside them once he isn't alongside them. Last week we celebrated Jesus' ascension. When he was on earth, Jesus was the one who was alongside his disciples. He was with them as they journeyed from town to town. He was with them to teach them and answer their questions. Once he ascended, the Holy Spirit would be the one coming alongside them. The Holy Spirit would come to them, be present with them, and give them peace.

I've talked a lot about Jesus, but today is all about the Holy Spirit. The word that Jesus uses to describe the Holy Spirit in today's Gospel lesson is *parakletos*. It's a compound Greek word. The first part, *para*, means beside. The second part, *kaleo*, means to call. Literally, the term means "the one who is called alongside." In a courtroom, that person is your advocate or

your counselor. It can also mean someone who is called to come alongside you when you go through trials and tribulations and troubles, griefs and sorrows. A person who does that is someone we'd call a comforter.

Jesus knows that his disciples will need someone who is called to be alongside them, to comfort them in their sorrows and troubles, to give them peace. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, the "Helper" and "Spirit of truth." He would be with them forever, so the disciples would never be alone. The Holy Spirit would call to mind all the words of Jesus. So in death and life, the words of Jesus would continue echoing in their hearts and ears.

The Spirit doesn't do anything new. The Spirit doesn't bring a new gospel or a new message. The Spirit testifies about Christ, and gives the disciples the same power.

Lutherans can make the Holy Spirit seem kind of boring. We're not like the Pentecostal Christians who talk about manifestations of the Spirit in speaking in tongues or dancing wildly. We don't have miraculous healings like televangelists. We see the Holy Spirit doing more miraculous things, though. We see the Holy Spirit calling us to faith, creating faith where there wasn't any. We see the Holy Spirit gathering us together with our fellow believers, not leaving us in isolation. We see the Holy Spirit enlightening us, working in us to help our faith grow. We see the Holy Spirit sanctifying us, working in us to make us more holy. We see the Holy Spirit giving us peace when we face troubles, even peace in the middle of troubles. We see the Holy Spirit working through us to bring peace to others in their troubles.

The Helper promised by Jesus is the Holy Spirit—the Comforter, the Counselor, and the Advocate. He is the same Spirit given to the disciples on Pentecost, so that all of Jesus' disciples could speak openly and proclaim all

that God had done. He is the same Spirit who came into your hearts when you were baptized, who washed away your sins and made you holy, who planted the seed of faith nurtured by the baptismal waters. He is the same Spirit who speaks to you through God's Holy Word even now. And He is the same Spirit who continues to guide and lead us.

The Holy Spirit continues to work through Word and Sacrament, to work through us, to create faith. The Holy Spirit gives us the words to say when we share our faith. The Holy Spirit gives us the boldness to share our faith with those around us.

Jesus, talking to his disciples, doesn't promise that he'll take away or make them forget the trouble they've faced, but he does promise them peace and his presence as they face trouble and adversity. We don't just rejoice that we hold on to Jesus. We rejoice that Jesus holds on to us and gives us his peace. We have a friend in Jesus, one who carries our sins and griefs, and will continue to do so. Jesus gives us a place of solace and peace in the midst of the troubles and tribulations of the world.

Yes, in this world you will have trouble. That's guaranteed. But it pales in comparison with the future glory and blessing that awaits us at Christ's return. Yes, now we struggle against sin, death, and the power of the devil. Yes, now we suffer from the fallout of a fallen world and sinful humanity. Yes, we want to shout at the troubles of the world, "No more!" But none of that will last forever. By his death Jesus destroyed death, and by his resurrection he offers new life to all who believe in his name. In this world we will have troubles, but we have peace from God, as well. A peace that passes all understanding.

Pastor David Beagley
Memorial Lutheran Church and Student Center,
Ames, Iowa Pentecost Sunday June 5, 2022