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Ashes to Fire, Easter Week 6
With Jesus and the Disciples (2)
John 14:15-29
Romans 10:17

1. Loving Obedience
- John 14:15, 13:34-35

2. Loving Presence
- John 14:25-27, 15-17, 7:38-39, 12:48

3. Love in the Unknown
- John 14:28-29; Isaiah 9:6

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A2F
Easter Week 6:
With Jesus and the Disciples (2)
(John 14:15-29)

Two and half years ago I had my automobile accident that resulted in a traumatic brain injury. I know it was a long time ago in most people's minds, but I live with it every day, and I deal with the effects every day. I work hard to make sure that event and the injury doesn't define me, but I can tell you it has become a part of my story and will be from then on. It changed my life in many ways. And I will say that some of those changes were for the better. For instance, I must function at a slower pace.

Before the accident, I worked 60-70 hours a week regularly. I slept only 5 hours a night, and that was often fitful, waking up stressed about things – about what someone in the church body said or did, or about someone in conflict with someone, or about whether or not what we were trying to do in order to help the church become healthy and growing was going to be accepted by everyone in the church. I had scores of meetings each week – administrative meetings, counseling meetings, calling meetings, on and on. On top of all that, I was finishing up getting my second masters degree – a Master of Divinity in Missional Leadership – so that I could be a better leader for you. The busier I got, the greater the adrenaline surge to get me through it. I was running at full speed all the time. And I was killing myself for the sake of the church!

Compare that to my life now. Usually now I work between 50-60 hours each week – sometimes more, rarely less – instead of the 70 plus I was working. Every day I must take a brain break in the afternoon for a half hour, essentially shutting my brain off so it can rest, or else I will be overcome with brain fatigue – a fatigue that feels like my whole body is drained, not just my mind. Only those with brain injuries can understand that. Before the accident it seemed like the greater the stress, the greater the adrenaline. Now, the greater the stress, the more difficult it is to get my brain to work. I have to pace myself better. I can't have as many meetings as I used to have. I'm learning to take a day off – or at least, trying to. I *must* sleep 7-8 hours a night; if I get less for one night, I'm okay, but if it's more than that, I'm a zombie. Now, I'll admit, even telling you this, I feel guilty. I feel guilty that I am admitting to you that I try to get a full night's sleep – there's a part of me that is afraid that you will think I'm not working hard enough for you! I know you don't think that, that's just part of some of my wrong thinking – we've all got some, and that's some of mine. But the accident has helped me actually learn to relax more, to find more balance, and not stress so much about things. Stress is a terrible thing, even with a *good* brain. Whether stress is brought on by circumstances beyond our control or

brought on by ourselves, stress, difficulty, and pain in life take a huge toll on our lives, our relationships, and our overall health.

Wouldn't it be nice to be stress-free? Imagine a life without stress. Imagine a life of complete peace and serenity. Okay, now everyone assume your favorite yoga position...

Stress takes its toll on all of us. So naturally, we long for peace. The official definition of peace is, "freedom from disturbance; or, quiet and tranquility." (*sigh*) Another definition is "freedom from, or the cessation of, war and violence." We understand that definition. It would be nice to be stress-free. The trouble with our standard definitions of peace is that they all say that peace is based on the circumstances *outside* of us; that if things around us can be controlled, we'll have peace. But that kind of peace is an elusive thing because circumstances are very difficult if not impossible to control; just when you think you've controlled your environment, your kids start fighting. Or your boss walks in. Or your in-laws drop in. Or your spouse...does something... (*I don't know; you fill in the blank*)? Or life takes a hard left turn and you get a doctor's difficult diagnosis out of the blue. Or some small middle-eastern faction declares war against our country. Or the wrong person gets elected president. I want to say to you that the problem is *not* the stress in our lives. We've all got it and we'll always have it. The problem is our *definition* of peace; because that definition doesn't work; at least not for very long, because our circumstances always change. And there is a bigger problem, which is how we go about trying to get peace – we kill ourselves trying to control our circumstances. We tell ourselves as soon as we can get this issue taken care of, or make that person happy, or make that amount of money, than things will get better. I understand that mindset, because I did the same thing, and I'm still tempted to.

What if I told you there is a surefire way to get peace in your life at *all* times; would you be interested? This peace does not come through gaining control, but actually by letting go of control.

In our Scripture passage for today from our *Ashes to Fire* daily reading journal, Jesus helps us come up with a correct definition of peace, and the answer to how to always have it. The passage's context is another part of the conversation Jesus was having with his disciples after they shared their last supper together and before Jesus was arrested. Last week we saw in the passage right before this, how life can be troubling, and how the disciples had many of the same feelings we have. But we learned that the treatment for a troubled heart is trust in Jesus, and that we have a task to do as long as we are still on earth – and that is to introduce people to Jesus so that as many as possible will be in heaven with us. Today we pick up the conversation in John 14:23-29. Would you please stand with me, and would you actively listen to God's word as I read it to you? The Bible tells us that faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17), and I want to strengthen your faith today as you hear God's Word:

"Jesus (said), 'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone

who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. 'You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.'" (John 14:23-29, niv)

You'll notice that Jesus said that he would give us peace – *his* peace – not like the world's peace. But he also gives us the *way* to receive his peace – and even gives us an example of his peace in action. So let's look at this, and in the process we will learn the right definition of peace as well as how to get it.

Jesus starts by laying the groundwork, or the foundation, of how we can have a different kind of peace in this world, and it comes through...

1. Loving *Obedience*

The kind of peace we are looking for will only come as we are *rightly related* to *Jesus*.

This is so important that Jesus is actually repeating himself here – he already said this in verse 15...

"If you love me, keep my commands." (John 14:15, niv)

This link between love and obedience is really important.

Jesus is saying that the Father and Son can be present *in us* – they will come and make their home IN us. This isn't a figurative or metaphorical statement; it is a true spiritual reality. God really resides in us. However, there is a condition to this abiding, residing presence of God in us: it is that we love Jesus and obey his teaching. This way of thinking was something new for the disciples.

You've got to remember the religious and sociopolitical situation of the disciples that Jesus was talking to. Religiously, they were bound to a religious system that said the only way they were going to have peace with God was by offering more sacrifices than the number of sins they'd committed. The sacrifices had to outweigh the sins. So peace with God was a *temporary* thing because they were always going to sin again and offend God again, and the only solution was to go back to the temple and offer another round of sacrificed animals. That was their religious reality. Can you imagine how bad that Temple scene must have been, with all the blood constantly flowing from the animal sacrifices?

Understand, too, that socially and politically, the Jews were an oppressed people. They lived under the tyrannical rule of the Roman Empire. They lived in a system designed to keep them poor and inferior. They had no privileged opportunities for wealth or education. There was no way for a Jew to get ahead in the world unless he

was dishonest, or if he aligned himself with the Romans (who were their oppressors). So their only means of living a peaceful existence without fear was ultimately to overthrow the Roman government. So for the Jew, peace would come religiously through temple sacrifices and socially through revolutionary war. That was their mindset; pretty stressful and *not* very peaceful.

But Jesus completely reoriented their thinking: Jesus set the prerequisite for peace by saying that it required a relationship with him. *Nothing else*. In other words, peace was not going to be found in obeying religious rules or laws or making sacrifices of animals. Peace was not going to be found by rising up in violent opposition to their oppressors or having a bigger military force than those who were causing them stress. Peace was going to be found only in a loving relationship with Jesus. And the proof of their love for Jesus would be their obedience to him.

Let me give you an example. Most of you know that Shelly and I raised three boys. Well, *I* raised three boys, Shelly raised four; she's still trying to raise me. But the most important thing to us was that our boys knew – and still know – that we love them. The context of love made their obedience to us even more significant. Here's what I mean: sometimes, children will obey their parents based on whether or not the child is willing to put up with the punishment (in other words, is whatever disobedience worth the punishment they will have to go through if they get caught?). But we wanted our boys' obedience to us to be based on their relationship with us; would they respect us and love us enough to trust that we wanted the best for them? Rather than obedience based on fear of discipline, we wanted it to be based on love. Do you see the difference and how it applies to our relationship to Jesus?

For us to *love* Jesus AND *obey* him, it means some very important things. It means that we trust that he is God, and that he loves us. It means we trust that he died on the cross for our sins so that we don't have to keep making temple sacrifices. It means he rose from the dead. It means there wasn't a rock heavy enough to put in front of his tomb that could outweigh his love for us and keep him in the grave. So, it means we trust his Father's intentions for us, and that his commands are for our best, so we obey him. Do you understand this?

He loves us; we love and obey him. There is a word that Jesus uses to describe "love." He used in back in John 13:34-35 when he said:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35, niv)

He uses that same word here when he tells us to love and obey him. Jesus used an extremely rare word to explain that kind of love: "agape," which you may have heard means "unconditional love," which it does – partly. But it literally means *suffering love*. It is a love that is willing to suffer for the other person. We are to love Jesus so much that we would willingly suffer or even die for him. Jesus is saying we must have a sold-out-for-him love that will obey even to the death if necessary.

So whatever this peace is that we want in our lives, it is clear that we are only going to get it in the context of a committed, loving, obeying relationship with Jesus.

Then Jesus promises that within that loving relationship will be a...

2. Loving Presence

Let me review what Jesus said here in verses 25 and 26:

“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:25-26, niv)

Once again, Jesus is repeating himself. He’s already said this in verses 15-17:

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” (John 14:15-17, niv).

This wasn’t the first time the disciples heard this; Jesus had already promised the Holy Spirit in chapter 7:

“Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, ‘rivers of living water will flow from within them.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” (John 7:38-39, niv)

Here’s what this means: the Holy Spirit of God, who was already working on the *outside* of the disciples would soon be able to reside *inside* the disciples and all those who love and obey Jesus. This would take place *after* Jesus had been crucified, buried, and then risen from the dead. The reason for that was that Christ’s death on the cross allows our lives to be forgiven and cleansed of sin – making our lives a clean place for the Holy Spirit to live. The Holy Spirit is *Holy*; that means he must have a holy temple to dwell in. That is now you and I, thanks to Christ. That’s why Jesus had to die and rise from the dead first.

Jesus had been telling the disciples that he was going to leave them, and that where he was going, they couldn’t follow. But he was also making it clear that his departure was *not* going to mean the end of his relationship with them. Their relationship with Jesus (and *ours*) would be continued and extended through the Holy Spirit who would be given to them (and us) as soon as Jesus was raised from the dead.

Jesus intentionally used a title for the Holy Spirit that is important if we are going to understand part of the Spirit’s role in our lives. Jesus used the term, “advocate” to describe the Spirit. Your Bible might use words like “counselor” or “comforter,” but “advocate” is actually the most accurate. The word in the original language is *parakletos* (*paraaw klaytos*). It was actually a legal term – like a defense attorney – someone who pleads the case of someone else before the judge. So here, the judge is

God, and people are judged based on whether they love Jesus and follow his command to believe in him – that eternal life comes through his death and resurrection. In John 12:48 Jesus said:

“There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.” (John 12:48, niv)

Remember that Jesus, through his death and resurrection is the one who goes between the Father and us; then next, the Spirit goes between us and the Father as the Spirit lives in us.

So how does the Spirit being an advocate for us bring us peace?

When we love and obey Jesus as Lord of our lives and we let the Spirit work in us, the Spirit is the one who helps keep us in the Father’s will, and that brings us peace.

If you think about how holy and perfect God is, you might be tempted to think that there’s no way you could ever know enough about God’s will for you that you could obey it all. It’s like this: I remember when I worked for the Oregon State Police many years ago; there was a book that was larger than the Bible with paper that was just as thin, filled with all the laws in Oregon for drivers. It was called “The Oregon Motor Vehicle Law Code.’ There were so many laws in there that I can promise you – at any given time that you are driving you are breaking some law and you don’t even know it. Some of the laws you don’t even have to be driving; you are breaking a law when your car is sitting in your garage. There’s no way you could know them all and at any given time you are probably breaking several of them. Now think about everything Jesus taught; how in the world will you remember all that, much less obey it all? Jesus gave the answer: the Holy Spirit will help you! Remember what Jesus said in that passage, in verse 26:

“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, *will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*” (John 14:26, niv, italics added)

So when we love and obey Jesus, we have the Spirit as an advocate who reminds us of everything Jesus taught and gives us the power to obey it all (*repeat*). Most of all, because of the presence of the Father and Jesus in our lives through the Spirit, we have peace:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27, niv)

There it is. Peace is not the absence of strife or stressful circumstances. Peace is not some temporary tranquility. Peace is not the waning of wars. Peace is a *person*. Peace is the presence of God in our lives by the Spirit when we love and obey Jesus. *There it is!* Peace that is present *even while* all around us there can be stress and chaos.

The prerequisite for peace is love and obedience to Jesus, and then peace is the Person of God residing in us. This is why Jesus said that his peace is not like the

world's peace. The world's peace is to stop all stress – to put you in a peaceful *position*. Jesus' peace is not positional – it's a *person*. The Spirit is with us and IN us at all times; no matter what position we are in or what the circumstances around us are, we can have peace.

Then in the passage Jesus gives us some incredible reassurance: not only can we have peace – his peace – when things are stressful, we can have peace even when there are things going on that we can't even understand; when God doesn't make sense or even seems absent. We can be assured we even have his...

3. Love in the *unknown*

Jesus concludes these verses with these thoughts in verses 28 and 29:

“You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.” (John 14:28-29, niv)

It comes back to love, obedience, and peace. First of all, he's saying that if they really loved him, they would trust him, even though they didn't understand what he was doing, where he was going, and that he would be crucified, buried, and rise from the dead. They would trust him – that he is doing what the Father wants, which is always what's best for everyone. But he's also saying that when we love and obey him and we have the Spirit – even when we don't understand what is going on in our lives or what is happening in the midst of some extremely stressful, painful circumstances – when we love and obey Jesus and have the Spirit, we will have peace. And then, when those stressful circumstances pass, things will make more sense, our faith will be strong, and we will *still* have peace.

So there you have it. Real peace is a Person. That's why Jesus is called the “Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6) If you want peace that is present even in the midst of stuff you can't even understand, in the midst of extremely painful circumstances and you have no answers, then keep loving and obeying Jesus. You will have the advocate – the Spirit – who will keep you at peace.

Love Jesus. Obey him. Trust him. Let the Spirit work in your life. Keep loving and obeying Jesus and let the Spirit live and work in your life. Do you feel like you don't have enough of the Holy Spirit in your life? Ask for more of him!

Pray