

Ashes to Fire: *Give Peace a Chance*

John 14:23-29

1. Loving Obedience

John 14:15

2. Loving Presence

John 14:25-26, 15-17; 7:38-39; 12:48; 14:26, 27

3. Love in the Unknown

John 14:28-29; Isaiah 9:6

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West Valley Church
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Easter Week 6: John 14:23-29
"Ashes to Fire: *Give Peace a Chance*"

I'm guessing that any of us in this room are facing severe stressors that are nothing at all to laugh about. Sometimes stress is circumstantial, other times we create it, right? Either way, stress is a serious matter, especially in our western culture.

During dinner one evening on our last trip to Guyana, I was talking with Westley, the project manager of the Victoria church. I told him that I was envious of his culture's lifestyle. To me, it seemed that nothing stressed them out. They appeared to be really relaxed, willing to deal with life no matter what comes. I told him I admired that. He said, "We look at you and admire you! We think that the reason our country is so far behind in advancements and development is because we are lazy. We see you and think you are successful, so we want to be more like the people in your culture!" Almost without thinking I said, "No you don't want that! We are killing ourselves because of the pace we keep and the stress we create."

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; quiet and tranquility." Another definition is "freedom from, or the cessation of, war and violence." We understand that. It would be nice to be stress-free. The trouble with our standard definitions of peace is that peace is based on outside circumstances, and that is an elusive thing that's very difficult to control; just when you think you've controlled your environment, your children walk in. Or your boss. Or your in-laws. Or your spouse....? Or some small middle-eastern country declares war against us. Or the wrong person gets elected president. Or life takes a hard left turn and you get a doctor's difficult diagnosis out of the blue. You see, the problem is *not* the stress in our lives. The problem is our *definition* of peace; it doesn't work; at least not for very long. And the bigger problem is how we go about trying to get peace.

What if I told you there is a surefire way to get peace in your life at *all* times; would you be interested? Good, because there *is*! And God himself is the One who gives it to us.

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. Its context is that it is another part of the conversation Jesus was having with his disciples after they shared their last supper together and before Jesus was arrested. As we learned last week, Judas had already left the room to go to the religious leaders and betray Jesus. We pick it up in John 14:23-29 –

“Jesus replied, ‘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 and 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 (even though we haven’t figured out exactly what it is yet), 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.

If you remember, one of the things we talked about on both of the last two Sunday’s was about the unity of the Father and the Son – that the Son does everything the Father asks, and so they are One in everything – in purpose, in action, in glory. Now 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 was something new for the disciples.

You’ve got to remember the religious and sociopolitical situation of the disciples that Jesus was talking to. 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 sins they'd committed. The sacrifices had to outweigh the sins. So peace with God was a *temporary* thing because they were bound to sin 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.

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 aligned themselves with the hated Roman oppressors. So their only means of living a peaceful existence without fear was ultimately to overthrow the Roman government. For the Jew, peace would come through temple sacrifices and through revolutionary war.

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? Do you see the difference?

Are you getting the point? For us to *love* Jesus AND *obey* him, it means some very important things. It means that we trust that he is God. 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 enough dirt on this earth to bury him under that could outweigh his love for us and keep him in the grave. It means we trust his Father's intentions for us, that his commands are for our best, so we obey him. Do you understand this?

He loves us; we love and obey him. Do you remember what I said last week about loving each other, and that we are to love like Jesus loves? Remember I said Jesus used an extremely rare word to explain that kind of love: "agape," which means *suffering love*. It is a love that is willing to suffer for the other person. That's the *same word* Jesus uses here when he tells us to love him: we are to love him 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 shouldn’t have been news to the disciples; 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)

In other words, the Holy Spirit of God, who was already working on the *outside* of the disciples would then reside *inside* those who love and obey Jesus, *after* Jesus had been crucified, buried, and then risen from the dead.

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*. 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. There are many things that the Spirit does in us that we won't go into today (we will in a couple weeks), but for now realize that this is one of the important things the Spirit does.

So how does the Spirit being an advocate for us bring us peace? Let me give you a simple explanation. Most of you are aware of the auto accident I was in over a year and a half ago. The accident was caused by a guy who was speeding on his motorcycle and came around the corner hitting me, causing my car to fly through the air, flip over, and then roll several times down the embankment. In our wonderful state of Washington, motorcycle drivers are not required to carry liability insurance, so guess what – he had no insurance. He also had no real assets, so the insurance companies couldn't go after him and neither could we; it would be a big waste of money. So Shelly and I are paying out thousands of dollars for my immediate and ongoing medical care deductibles, copays, etc. But my insurance companies have been paying out, too. And they don't like doing what we pay them to do, so they hide behind obscure laws, foot-dragging, and all kinds of tactics. Then they threatened to come after us to get reimbursed for what they've spent on me – there's even an outside chance that they could get whatever equity we have in our home. So we finally had to hire an attorney to protect us from the medical industry and our own insurance company. The attorney is someone who understood and could speak legalese and could represent us to keep the insurance and medical companies from coming after us, which they seem to have a penchant for doing. I can't tell you how *comforting* it is to know that we have an *advocate*; we have such peace of mind knowing that our attorney will represent us. I won't say who our attorney is, but if you need an attorney, call me – I can highly recommend him to you. *That* is a tiny analogy of what the Spirit does for us, giving us complete peace with God (Not that God is our adversary in any way at all; every analogy breaks down). Here's the point: 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.

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. 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 we don’t know what’s going on. 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 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.” (Is. 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. Have peace when your dog chews up your couch, when your car breaks down, when your bills pile up, when life gets hard and when life is easy. Keep loving and obeying Jesus and let the Spirit live and work in your life.

pray