

Rev. Danny Mackey
Pentecost
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John 14:23–31
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[[Jesus said:]] “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.”

The 1st Century was filled with all manner of immorality and violence. 75 percent of those living in the Roman Empire were enslaved. People were truly oppressed physically. And they were oppressed culturally. A plethora of religions existed, catering to whatever whim or fetish a person might have. Worshippers abused themselves with drink and mind-altering drugs. Many others engaged in homosexuality or worse perversion. Countless babies were left on pagan temple steps to die of exposure—those that weren’t killed through use of miscarriage-inducing drugs. A whole group of boys were castrated, transitioned into eunuchs so that they could fill certain roles. Entertainment of the day included watching people kill each other or animals ripping people apart in the Coliseum, also people committing sexual acts upon one another. Riots and rebellions were a common occurrence. Murders and assassinations were acceptable ways to gain or to maintain political power. In order to avoid Rome’s rule, one group even committed mass suicide. Rome kept the peace, but only with the sword. Crucifixions and capital punishments were abundant. It was an age of tyrants and political correctness.

In the 1st Century, the world was in full bloom. When Jesus says, “Not as the world gives do I give to you,” He’s contrasting His peace with the world’s. The peace the world has to offer is peace by force and oppression. It’s the peace of all your enemies lying dead at your feet. And we are increasingly becoming like the 1st-Century world. Indeed, we might even have more in common today with the 1st-Century world than with the mid-20th Century.

Jesus says, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words. And the word that you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.”

It took a few hundred years, but Christianity transformed the Greco-Roman world. It brought with it many good and excellent things. The immorality of sex and violence and drugs receded in the wake of a nobler Way.

Christians were rounded up and thrown into the Coliseum and the people shouted, “Look at the Christians die!” When the gladiators and beasts were released, the Christians didn’t fight back or run but looked up to heaven as their blood was spilt. But soon the shouts became whispers and the people marveled, “Look at the Christians die.”

Christians, under the cover of darkness, approached pagan temples, on whose steps babies were abandoned to the gods. They took those babies into their homes and their hearts. They had no fear of Jupiter or Mars, Apollo or Venus—for their God is the Creator of heaven and earth. The Christ, who rose again from the dead. And those children were raised in the faith, their lives valuable because of Christ’s death for them.

And many Christians escaped lives of homosexuality and prostitution. St. Paul makes specific reference to this in Ephesians 2. They left demonic worship and were saved by God’s grace, becoming children of God. And then they went out into the world to do good works. Works good by God’s standard, not necessarily what the world deems as good. They fled all substance abuse that sought to enslave them. Instead, they clung to Christ’s Word.

And the world was transformed... at least, for a little while. Our own country was founded on the Judeo-Christian principles that God has endued all men—men, women, and children—with certain inalienable rights. Things were getting better. So much so, that many theologians started conceiving the very incorrect idea that we could somehow make heaven on earth a reality. As if, through our actions, we could bring about the kingdom of God on earth.

But humanity is sinful. Our corruption is so pervasive, it’s impossible for us to tell where our humanity ends and where our sin begins. And even with all the good that Christians have accomplished in this world—with hospitals and schools and universal dignity for all people, male and female, slave and free, Gentile and Jew—we have also committed great sin. The Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades, anti-Semitic atrocities, to name a few. And those were institutional sins. Christians, because they still have flesh and blood, continue to commit sin—sin against themselves, sin against others, and sin against God.

That’s because Christians too often abandon Christ’s Word. We call ourselves—and may even think of ourselves as Christian—but when we don’t keep God’s Word in an honest and upright heart, we’ve strayed from the faith. We no longer follow Christ and heed His teachings. Because we no longer love Him and the Father.

Instead, we become ever more in love with the world. That's why our culture is deteriorating before our very eyes. We've turned to the world and its false-yet-seductive promises. We've stopped listening to Christ. Because of our sin. Our sin which ever lives in our flesh and bones.

But what has the world given us? More war and hate. School shootings, which doubled from 30 to 61 in 2021. Critical Race Theory and its histories of oppression. Supposedly, 11 to 13-year-old sex-workers in Loudon County, Virginia, just outside of Washington, D.C. A culture of death. Black women saying they'd rather abort their babies than give them to white people to adopt. A culture of convenience and comfort at the cost of our humanity. A culture of disposability, where everything is thrown away, including our marriages. Anxiety and depression skyrocketing—especially among our children. Children thrown into confusion regarding their gender—because we've sexualized our children. And now we have well-meaning parents mutilating their children's bodies to fill some ideological need. And then there's political polarization and intense tribalism, where we refuse to even listen to one another. A culture of lies, where we post self-aggrandizing lies about our lives on social media and slanderous abuse about others. An era of Fake News and Disinformation Governance Boards.

Is this what we want? Apparently, it's what our culture wants. And many Christians have gone along with it. They've gone the way of the world.

What does Christ's Word say about this? How does He respond?

Christ died for the world. That's the very good news the apostles preached. As St. Paul said, "I am resolved to nothing among you other than Christ and Him crucified." Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, regardless of how horrific they may be. He died for all the violence, immorality, and corruption. Jesus took on our culture of death and swallowed it up with His own death. Instead of seeking to crush His enemies, Jesus made it so all people might be made His friends. We know how and how much Christ loves the world by His sacrifice for it.

And then Christ rose from the dead. He rose so that we aren't left with death but life. Life and light and hope. Life in His life. Light from His glorious message of the resurrection, which enlightens the whole world. Hope that just as Jesus rose from the dead, so shall we have our own resurrection.

Christ also responds by sending His Holy Spirit. That's who the apostles received on Pentecost. This Holy Spirit then brought to the apostles' remembrance all that Jesus had done and said and taught. He guided them in all truth to write down for us the sacred Scriptures, so that we might hear them and also believe. His Word is a Word that is counter cultural. Indeed, it transcends culture! (Just as heaven is above the earth.) It's a Word that diagnosis our condition and then offers the sure and certain cure. In a world where peace can't be found, Christ and His Word give us a peace that can't be taken away.

And the Holy Spirit made the apostles bold. "God has made Him both Lord and Christ," preached St. Peter, "this Jesus whom you crucified." St. Peter preached to the very men who cried out for Jesus' crucifixion, offering them forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Instead of those crowds turning on the apostles, about 3,000 were saved. They lined up at the rivers, repenting and being baptized—they and their children. Then the apostles entered the people's homes and gathering places to break bread in fellowship.

We still break bread today in the fellowship of the Lord's Supper. We gather to hear Christ's Word, and He comes and makes our homes with us. He dwells in us, His Holy Spirit taking up residence in our bodies, which, as St. Paul says, become His living temples. And Christ teaches us.

Christ tells us that this is how things will be until He returns. All so that we lose not the faith. "*And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe.*" These are heavy things. They can lead us to despair. They can cause us to be angry with the world. But we aren't righteous enough to have righteous anger. When we get angry, we sin. So Jesus tells us that these things will take place so that we don't give up hope in Him or begin to rely on ourselves to fix the world's problems. Rather, we entrust all our hopes on Christ. We rely on Christ and His love to change hearts and minds. We go with God's Word and tell others what He has done—and even remind Christians who've strayed—so that they might be saved. His is an eternal peace. The world's enticements fade away. Through us, Christ calls them back to Him, offering them an everlasting peace.

This peace of Christ isn't some nebulous, free-floating sensation. It is the being made right with God. What we call justification: sinners declared righteous for Christ's sake by grace through faith. That peace was accomplished on the cross. It can't be undone. The world changes its mind, but God doesn't and can't. That would go against His nature. That

means that what Christ Jesus has done on the cross is set, fixed in eternity. Jesus is the Lamb “slain from the foundation of the world,” writes the beloved disciple.

And Christ’s peace gives us courage and strength to endure. Endure the deterioration of the world and our culture. Endure whatever persecutions may come. Even endure whatever trials and sorrows we will face, whether they be illness or financial woes or watching our loved ones stray from the faith. Because we have a God that is greater than the world. He is the Creator of heaven and earth—and all therein, including us. And what He’s done can’t be undone by anyone or anything.

That good news might help reshape our culture once more. It did before. It has in other parts of the world. Right now, the Gospel is going gangbusters in Africa, a continent where the Gospel first spread in the 1st Century and then it went dark. Again, the Light of Christ is shining among the Africans. It could be the same with North America. We don’t know if it will, or if it will only get worse. But what we do know that it won’t get so bad that we Christians can’t endure. Come the end, we trust that Christ will come again and set all things right. Set right, finally and without the threat of ever getting bad again. “Come, Lord Jesus.”

In His name.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ + Jesus.