

Peace

[Luke 10:1-11, 16-20](#)

You have probably heard that St. Francis said, “Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words.” This is very convenient for those of us who are shy or those of us who find it difficult to articulate our faith, or who don’t want to appear pushy. We want the way we live to be enough, so that we can get away without actually admitting that we are Christians, without actually saying anything that might indicate that we are passionate about God.

But in today’s gospel reading, Jesus sends seventy people to go to the places that he plans to visit. He tells them to travel light, not taking their baggage with them - and he also tells them what to say. Does he suggest that they stay quiet and hope that people will realize they are his disciples? No, he tells them clearly what to say.

He says, “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’” The first thing you say is “Peace”.

Later, when Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection he would often say, “Peace be with you.” And remember the angels at Jesus’ birth, “Glory to God in the highest and peace to humanity on whom God’s favor rests.” (Luke 2:14)

Peace, ‘Peace to this house!’ Peace be with you! Peace on earth!

When I first moved to the States I remember walking through a department store -I wasn’t intending to buy anything – it was just a shortcut from one street to the next. It was first thing in the morning, and there were hardly any customers. Sales person after sales person called out, “Hi, how are you doing?” I felt puzzled and perhaps a little insulted because not one of them waited to hear how I was doing. Now I understand that, “Hi, how are you doing?” is often just a greeting and nothing more.

“Peace be with you,” or “Peace to this house” is, I think, something quite different. I don’t think it’s just a polite greeting. Jesus would not have needed to teach his disciples their manners. And back then, words were known to be powerful.

In today’s world, talk is cheap. We are constantly bombarded with words and it is easy to forget that words are powerful. Yet “In the beginning was the Word...” (John 1:1) – it was the word of God that created the cosmos. “And God said let there be light, and there was light.” (Gen 1:3) God’s word brings a new world into being. Words are often powerful and creative.

One of my friends told me that she participated in a church where people greeted each other with “Peace be to you, and also to me.” This was, she explained, because if you are not peaceful within yourself you cannot offer peace to another. I understand that if we are filled with hatred, anxiety and anger then there is something lacking in our blessing of peace. But I think that the peace that Jesus means when he says “Peace be with you” is not an individual or personal peace but something rather bigger.

In the Jewish understanding, peace or *shalom* means wholeness, completion and rest. It's not just the absence of conflict, or the end of hostilities. Shalom is a life full of goodness and health, a close relationship with God, and being surrounded by friends who know and love you. It is personal and also communal. The Hebrew scriptures are full of mankind's aching desire for peace, and God's promise to bring us into the Sabbath rest for which we long.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27). This was just before he was going to be betrayed and crucified. Yet he talked of peace. The peace he brought was not in spite of the cross, but through it.

He gave us a peace which goes beyond our ability to fully comprehend. The peace that Christ gives is richer, and deeper than anything humans can create. Ultimately, it is a peace that comes from being united with the abiding peace of Godself. This peace of Christ comes then not from my individual peace, though that is important, but from our participation in the Body of Christ, our participation in the life of God who is Peace with a capital P. In her, all things are already resolved.

Through our baptism we are united with Christ, and being united with Christ we are united with each other; having been forgiven we forgive. From that place of forgiveness and unity in the risen Christ, we can face the harshest circumstances. Even in the face of loss and hardship, even in the face of death, we have been given access to peace. Peace which passes understanding, a peace that is given not as the world gives peace. A peace that is rooted in Christ himself, and that is unassailable.

So perhaps, when the disciple said "Peace to this house" it was not a greeting but an invitation – an invitation to be united with Christ, united with God in God's shalom. Or perhaps it was a blessing of peace that came not just from the individual person but from the wellspring of life, the core of shalom which is the very heart of God.

So we, like the seventy, get to go out and offer shalom to our neighbors. Shalom that comes from the deep connection we have with God. Shalom that is not just a polite greeting but is an invitation to radical transformation. Peace be to this house! Enroll in the reign of God! Unite your life with God's, and know the shalom that is in that mystical union.

When during our worship, we greet each other in the passing of the Peace this is what we are doing. It is not just a nice time to stretch our legs, catch up with friends and greet newcomers. No, it is much, much more. We are both making peace if that is needed, and declaring the peace that Christ has made for us. It is a powerful reminder of who we are in Christ, both individually and corporately. We are a people who in our unity with Christ have been given peace and have been made whole; and we are a people called to make peace and bring about wholeness, bring about shalom.

So between the two high points of our liturgical worship- after the proclamation of the Gospel and before the celebration of the Eucharist - we remember, declare and enact the peace which Jesus has given to us, and we are then able to come together in the restored shalom of the Body of Christ, the Prince of Peace, to experience communion with God and his people at the table. The New Covenant which we celebrate is

the covenant of peace between God and humanity and between each of us, a covenant sealed by Christ's own life.¹

It is this new life which we are to offer to those around us. The deep shalom that comes from reconciliation with God or which is itself reconciliation with God. The more we know it ourselves, the more we can share it with others. But I don't think it is dependent upon our own experience. God's peace is one of those "now and not yet" conundrums. We have shalom in Christ but we have yet to fully live into it. The reign of God is now and not yet – it is here but it is not fully realized and our mission is to make it a reality, to live as if it is really true, to live as if the reign of God is here and now. Because it is.

Jesus told his disciples, "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Whenever... people welcome you, say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' "And for those who did not welcome them they were still to tell them, "know this: the kingdom of God has come near."

The reign of God did not depend on how the blessing and the teaching were received. The reign of God does not depend on how centered and peaceful we *feel*. I believe that God can and does work through us even when we are not aware of it. I am not constantly aware of my unity with Christ and with y'all. Yet I know that the Holy Spirit is hard at work transforming me more and more into the person I was created to be and that is a person who is united with the abiding peace and love of Godself. In other words, a child of God, joined to God through Christ.

So when we say, "Peace be with you", "The peace of Christ be with you" the Holy Spirit is working through us inviting all of God's creation into shalom, into reconciliation with God, into the unassailable peace which is ours in Christ.

Having been invited, we invite. To build on the words of St. Francis, "preach the gospel at all times, saying peace be with you."

¹ My thanks to Lucas Damoff for helping me to articulate this. <https://theamia.org/posts/2014/11/12/the-real-reason-we-pass-the-peace/>