

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

Nov 16, 2014

Being Peace Makers

Ps 123 & John 14:25-27

(386, 400, 730, 731)

In 1965, the musical *Man of La Mancha* was first performed. It was based on the Miguel de Cervantes' 17th century classic, *Don Quixote*, performed as a play while Cervantes and others were in prison awaiting questioning and torture from the Spanish Inquisition.

The musical ran for over 2300 performances and won 5 Tony Awards. The theme song from the musical is still one of my favourite Broadway tunes - 'To Dream the Impossible Dream.'

The verse that continues to stand out for me is this:

*To fight for the right
Without question or pause
To be willing to march into Hell
For a heavenly cause*

The contexts are important in understanding the power of this vision.

In the mid-1960s, the civil rights and non-violence movements were gaining momentum in North America.

The anti-apartheid and anti-imperialism movements were gaining momentum in Africa.

The resistance to political, military, and economic colonialism was gaining momentum in Central and Latin America.

All of those movements, in their own faltering ways, were pursuing 'the impossible dream' of peace with justice.

That's the phrase, you will remember, that we read last week from The Presbyterian Church in Canada's statement of belief, inspired by other statements of faith that emerged from the 1960s:

*But the tragic evil that comes with war,
the slaughter of men, women, and children
must rouse us to work for peace. ...
We affirm that God is at work when people are
ashamed of the inhumanity of war
and work for peace with justice.*

We live in a more cynical time these days.
The ideals of 60s have given way to the harsh realism of the 10s.
People with 'impossible dreams,' like peace with justice, are too often marginalized.
"Get real," they are told, "and don't be so foolish.
Human beings have to fight and destroy.
That's just their nature."

But that is not how Christians see the world.
Through the redemptive work and witness of Jesus Christ,
we understand things differently.
And because of that different perspective,
we are willing, however faltering and hesitant and nervous we may be at times,
to be peace makers.

Indeed, in accepting Jesus as Lord,
as the ruler of our work and witness in this world,
we dare to dream the impossible dream,

*To fight for the right
Without question or pause
To be willing to march into Hell
For a heavenly cause.*

And that daring, that courage, that willingness to march into hell,
comes from the acceptance of the assurance that God is with us,
no matter how dire and dreadful the situation may seem.
"Fear not," says God over and over again, "for I am with you."

And that's the real point in our sermon text this morning, isn't it?
Peace with justice is a heavenly cause.
That's what God wants to see on earth.
That's what Jesus came to do.
That's what the gift of the Holy Spirit *is* doing within and among us now.

Remember the setting of this conversation with the disciples.
John has outlined the plot to kill Jesus in chapter 11.
Jesus does not turn away, but marches into the hell of Jerusalem.
There, in the midst of the machinations to get rid of him,
he summarizes his teachings for his disciples
and models for them the kind of peaceable kingdom he is initiating.
It involves service (washing their feet)
and sacrifice (staying firm to the heavenly cause).

The ugly death that results from his witness
does not extinguish the power of his loving life and energy.
He returns to their midst, as we saw last week,
with the same gift of peace and persistence in its pursuit.

If we are to take up that gift in our time and place,
if we are to be persistent in the pursuit of peace with justice,
if we are to work and witness for what God desires to see happen,
then there is one inspiring and sustaining truth in our passage this morning
worth remembering.

It is this:
we are already instruments of God's peace.
That is God's gift to us in Jesus Christ and made real by the work of the Holy Spirit.
The only question is how we accept the gift and what we do with it.
And that's a big question!

To help us deal with that question,
Jesus promises us the support of the Holy Spirit.
The Spirit will constantly teach us and remind us
of this unique peace that comes from God.
It is not a peace that we can create on our own,
not a peace that the world can give on its own.
The Greek word used here is *eirene*,
used in the LXX to translate *shalom*,
which refers to all the blessings that God has bestowed on creation.
It's that broad and comprehensive.
It refers to the peace that we know deep within because God is with us.
It refers to the peace among us that God longingly hopes to facilitate.
It refers to the peace with justice that emerges
when humbly confident people join together into a world-wide commonwealth.
And, most importantly, it refers to the vision God has for his creation.

I don't think this is an impossible dream.
I think it is possible because God has called us to it,
done it for us,
and walks with us as we complete the dream together.
In Jesus, in our text this morning and many others,
God says, "Trust me and do not be afraid."
Walk into that hell that is the world for this heavenly cause
of peace with justice.
It won't be easy, or quick, or smooth.
Lots of people are still stuck in their fear, anger, and violent defensiveness.
But my kingdom will come, on earth as it is in heaven, with your help."

As I was scrolling through Facebook posts this morning,
I came across one from Fred Stewart,
who is the executive director of the Renewal Fellowship
within The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

It was a Sunday morning reminder
of a great phrase from the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians.
I'm going to use it as the closing of this sermon,
and continue to use it at the end of sermons for months to come,
just to remind us God's power to help us realize
the impossible dreams of his grace and peace.

***Now to him who by the power at work within us
is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,
to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations,
forever and ever. Amen
(Eph 3:20-21)***