

Finding Peace  
John 14:23–29  
Sunday, May 25, 2025 (Easter 6)

Let us pray: Lord, you say that those who love you will keep your word, and you will come to them and make your home with them. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to *hear* and *keep* your word, so that we might live new lives with you, now and forever, in Christ. Amen.

There is a scene in one of the *Star Wars* movies, where the evil Emperor Palpatine is giving his orders to Darth Vader. If you're not familiar with *Star Wars*, there is this ongoing battle between the Jedi (who are the good guys) and the Sith (the bad guys). Darth Vader and the Emperor are Sith. The Emperor tells Darth Vader to go kill all of the Jedi and then to go to these other places and kill all of these other people who oppose them. He says at the end, "Once more, the Sith shall rule the galaxy! And then we shall have *peace*." Except for the *six movies that follow*, in which the Jedi and the Sith are *still fighting*.

But I think that scene gives us a perfect example of what Jesus is talking about here. He is telling his disciples, "I am going to be leaving you soon, so here's what you need to know when I'm gone." And he says to them, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." *I do not give to you as the world gives*. That line really stood out to me as I was reading this. How does the world give peace?

So often, the world views peace as the absence of conflict. Whether that conflict is *external*, *interpersonal*, *physical*, or *internal*, *mental*, *emotional*, peace comes when there is no conflict.

Sometimes we eliminate conflict by eliminating the people with whom we are *in* conflict, like the Emperor in *Star Wars*. Once we get rid of those other people who are giving us problems or standing in our way, there won't be any more conflict, and we will have peace. This is peace through *power* or

*strength*. We seek peace through overpowering the threats or problems that we face. It is a peace that is dependent on dominance. That's one of the ways that the world gives peace.

Sometimes we eliminate conflict by *controlling* the people or circumstances around us. Not *eliminating* the problems but *controlling* them. If I can just control the world around me, make it exactly the way I want it to be, make people do what I want them to do, or do it all myself, then I will have peace.

Sometimes we eliminate conflict through compromise. That can happen in *good* ways, when you sit down and hash out a problem with someone and come to an agreement that is acceptable to everyone. But there is also *negative* compromise, when we just "go along to get along," seeking peace at the cost of truth or integrity. We compromise *ourselves* or ask someone else to compromise *themselves* in order to get rid of any conflict and have peace.

Sometimes we seek peace through *achievement*. Once I *succeed*, then I'll have peace. Once I have enough money or power; once I get this job or this degree or this relationship; once I reach this social status; once I prove myself, *then* I'll have peace. If I just *do more*.

Sometimes we seek peace through *escape*; escaping the problems or the conflict that keep us from being at peace. And we do that in so many ways – through mindless entertainment, busyness, distractions, self-medicating with drugs or alcohol. We say, "If I just don't *think about* my problems, if I numb myself to them, then I won't have to deal with them. If I just get drunk or high or busy doing something else, *then* I will have peace." And it *does* work, or else we wouldn't do it. It's just that it only works for a little while. It's *temporary*. You have to do it over and over again, because it's a peace that does not last.

Sometimes we seek peace through *avoidance*. Just don't deal with the problem at all. Avoid the person or situation that is causing the problem. Avoid having this conversation. *I'll deal with that later*, or *I just won't answer the phone or open this past due bill that came in the mail*, or *If I just don't go to the doctor, then I can't find out that anything is wrong*. If I just *ignore* the problem, *then* I'll have peace.

There are all these different ways that the world gives us peace. Or *tries* to give us peace. But that is not the kind of peace that Jesus gives. It's not *true* peace. The peace that Jesus gives is so much more than just the absence of conflict. So what *is* the peace that Jesus gives?

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Well, there are two kinds of peace in life: *external* peace and *internal* peace. The Greek word for peace that is used in the New Testament is the word *eirene*. It means *tranquility, serenity, contentment, safety, prosperity*. The Hebrew word for peace that Jesus would have used is the word *shalom*. It means *harmony, wholeness, balance*; everything is *in order* and *working together*, the way it is *supposed to*, the way it was *created to*.

So there is an *external* peace in which everything *around you* is in harmony and order. The people and things around you are working together, the way they were meant to. The world around you is in a state of tranquility and serenity and contentment and safety. It's more than just *not fighting* or *not being at war*. It's *harmony* and *wholeness* between people. That is *external* peace.

And then there's an *internal* peace in which everything *within you* is in harmony and order. Your heart and mind are working together, working the way they were created to. Your innermost being is in a state of tranquility and contentment and safety. You have this feeling like, "It's *good*," or at least, "It's *going to be good*." You are content with *who* you are and *where* you are at this exact moment in your life. You are not governed by worries and fears. That is *internal* peace.

So external peace is when you are not in conflict with anyone or anything else. You are at peace with *others*. Internal peace is when you are not in conflict with *yourself*. You are at peace with *yourself*.

You cannot have true *external* peace without true *internal* peace. You can't really have peace *around* you, if you don't have peace *within* you. My grandfather fought in WWII. Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945, and the war was over. But for the next 60 years, until the day he died, my grandfather *refused* to buy a Japanese-made automobile because, he said, he did not trust the Japanese because of what they did during the war. (That didn't stop him from buying Japanese-made TVs and stereos, but you get the point.) The fighting had stopped, but he didn't actually have *peace*. It's like the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu (pronounced *loud-za*) said,

“If there is to be peace in the world,  
    there must be peace in the nations.  
If there is to be peace in the nations,  
    there must be peace in the cities.  
If there is to be peace in the cities,  
    there must be peace between neighbors.  
If there is to be peace between neighbors,  
    there must be peace in the home.  
If there is to be peace in the home,  
    there must be peace in the heart.”

So you cannot have true *external* peace without true *internal* peace. You can't be at peace with the world around you, if you're not at peace with *yourself*. But you *can* have true *internal* peace *without* external peace. When everything is in chaos and the world is falling apart around you, you can *still* have *internal* peace. Because *internal* peace is not dependent on your circumstances or what is going on *around* you. But if you have *internal* peace, it will naturally flow forth into the world around you. And *that* is the kind of peace that Jesus gives.

The world regards peace as the absence of external conflict. But the peace that Christ gives is not just the *absence* of conflict. It is peace *in the midst* of conflict. And it is a peace that comes through *love*.

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In the scripture reading we heard earlier, Jesus starts by saying, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” So it all starts with love – realizing the love that God has for us. That God *created* you out of *love*. God *sustains* you and provides for your life *out of love*. God became human in Jesus Christ to live life with us *out of love*. Jesus *gave up* his life on the cross for the forgiveness of the world *out of love*. Jesus made it possible for us to live new lives with God and with each other, now and forever, *out of love*. You are God’s beloved child. *God loves you*.

And when we realize – really *internalize* – the love that God has for us, then we can trust that no matter what happens, God is with us. God has *got* this. God has got our backs. And if God has got this, then it’s going to be okay. *Even if it’s not okay*, it’s going to be okay. A diagnosis like cancer or Alzheimer’s? God has got this, and it’s going to be okay. The loss of a job? God has got this, and it’s going to be okay. The end of a relationship? God has got this, and it’s going to be okay. The death of someone you love, or even *your own* death? God has got this, and it’s going to be okay. No matter what we face, God has got this, and it’s going to be okay, even if it’s not okay. Because we belong to a God who cares for us in life and in death. Even if this life *ends*, we go on to live a new life with God. Life is about so much more than here and now, what we can see and touch. If something happens to us in this world, there is more to life than this world, and God’s love is stronger than the hardships and suffering and pain and conflict that we sometimes experience.

So knowing the love that God has for us can give us peace. But also, knowing that we are loved and accepted by God *no matter what* – no matter what we have *done*, no matter what has been done *to us* –

when we feel the love that God has for us, it can help us to love *ourselves*. “If God loves me and accepts me just the way I am, no matter what, then what am I beating myself up for?” The approval of *others*? *They* didn’t create you. Your life does not belong to *them*. “If I am loved and forgiven and accepted by the one who *created* my life, then maybe I can love and forgive and accept *myself*.”

And when we come to that place where we can love and forgive and accept *ourselves*, when we have grace and mercy and patience with *ourselves*, then it becomes a whole lot easier to love and forgive and accept *others*; to have grace and mercy and patience with *them*. Because *they* are created in the very same image of God that you are. They are loved and forgiven and accepted by God, just like you are. And you are not any more perfect than they are. We are *all* broken, and God loves us anyway.

The peace that Christ gives does not seek to control or dominate the world around us. It does not ask us to compromise ourselves or others. It does not require us to achieve a certain status or prove ourselves worthy. The peace that Christ gives does not seek to escape or avoid the pain and problems of life. That may be the way that the *world* gives peace, but we do not *belong* to the world, and Christ’s kingdom is not *of* this world. The peace that Jesus gives comes from knowing and experiencing the love that God has for us, and then allowing that love to filter into every other aspect of our lives, so that we can love and accept *ourselves* and love and accept *others*. When we can do *that*, then no matter what is happening in our lives or in the world around us, we will have peace. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.