

## **John 14: 23-29**

**IT'S AN OLD STORY. A WOMAN WAS PREPARING TO GIVE A TALK AT HER CHURCH'S WOMEN'S SALD LUNCHEON. SHE WOKE UP EARLY TO PRINT HER MESSAGE. SHE WASN'T QUITE FINISHED WHEN HER CHILDREN BEGAN COMING DOWNSTAIRS FOR BREAKFAST. SHE COULD HEAR THEM JUST AROUND THE CORNER IN THE KITCHEN AS THEY RUMMAGED THROUGH THE REFRIGERATOR AND PANTRY LOOKING FOR SOMETHING TO EAT. ONE OF THEM DISCOVERED HALF A PASTRY. SOON THEY ALL BEGAN SCREAMING AND ARGUING, EACH CLAIMING FOR HIS/HER OWN, THIS MOSTLY STALE, HALF-EATEN PASTRY.**

**MOM MADE A COUPLE OF FUTILE ATTEMPTS TO QUIET THEM DOWN AS SHE PRINTED THE LAST PAGE OF HER MESSAGE WHICH INCLUDED THE WORDS, "BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS, FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD." TAKING HER CUE FROM THIS PASSAGE, SHE CALLED INTO THE KITCHEN, "WOULD ONE OF YOU PLEASE BE THE PEACEMAKER?"**

**THERE WAS A MOMENT OF SILENCE, THEN HER SIX-YEAR-OLD SON PIPED UP, "I'LL BE THE 'PIECE-MAKER', MOM!"**

**THEN TO HIS BROTHER AND SISTER HE SAID, "HERE IS A PIECE FOR YOU AND YOU AND YOU AND ONE PIECE FOR ME."**

**"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."**

**LIFE WAS ABOUT TO RADICALLY CHANGE FOR THE DISCIPLES. AGAIN. WHEN THEY STARTED TO FOLLOW JESUS, THEY FOUND THEIR WORLD RADICALLY CHANGED. FOR MONTHS THEY HAD SAT AT THE FEET OF JESUS AS HE OPENED UP GOD'S TRUTH IN NEW WAYS. THEY HAD WITNESSED MIRACLES THAT WE ARE STILL TALKING ABOUT 21 CENTURIES LATER. NOW JESUS WAS PREPARING THEM FOR ANOTHER CHANGE IN THEIR LIVES. HE WAS VERY CONSCIOUS THAT HIS TIME WITH THEM WAS ABOUT TO COME TO AN END.**

**HIS WORDS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL ARE TO PREPARE THEM AND THE REST WHO BELIEVE FOR THE TIME WHEN THEY WOULD LIVE WITHOUT THE PHYSICAL PRESENCE OF JESUS. HE KNEW THAT FOR THEM IT WOULD BE A SHATTERING EXPERIENCE, ONE THAT WOULD SHAKE THE FOUNDATIONS OF THEIR LIVES.**

**MOST OF US PROBABLY DO NOT REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME OUR PARENTS LEFT US WITH A BABYSITTER, BUT ALMOST ALL OF US HAVE SOME MEMORY OF BEING LEFT: EITHER THE FIRST TIME ALONE WITHOUT A BABYSITTER, THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL, AT THE END OF A RELATIONSHIP, OR UPON THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE. EVEN IN THE MIDST OF OUR EASTER WORSHIP, ANTICIPATORY OR REMEMBERED GRIEF CAST ITS SHADOW. WHICH IS WHY WE**

HAVE THE READINGS FROM REVELATION AND JOHN. A REMINDER THAT WE ARE NOT ALONE AND THAT ETERNITY AWAITS.

C.S. LEWIS DESCRIBED IN HIS OWN LIFE A VERY SIMILAR EXPERIENCE ON THE DEATH OF HIS MOTHER AS HE WROTE IN HIS BOOK THE JOYFUL CHRISTIAN. "WITH MY MOTHER'S DEATH ALL SETTLED HAPPINESS, ALL THAT WAS TRANQUIL AND RELIABLE DISAPPEARED FROM MY LIFE. THERE WAS STILL TO BE MUCH FUN, PLEASURES WITH MY WIFE, BUT NO MORE OF THE OLD SECURITY." FOR LEWIS, A MAJOR PART OF HIS WORLD WAS GONE. JESUS KNEW THIS SAME DISORIENTATION WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN TO HIS DISCIPLES.

JESUS MAKES THE PROMISE IF THE DISCIPLES WOULD HOLD TRUE TO THE WORD, "WE (REFERRING BOTH TO HIMSELF AND THE FATHER) WILL COME TO THEM AND MAKE OUR HOME WITH THEM."

WHILE THE NORMAL HUMAN REACTION TO JESUS BEING TAKEN FROM THEM AND THE DISCIPLES BEING ON THEIR OWN WOULD HAVE BEEN ONE OF FEAR, JESUS IS ASSURING THEM THAT GOD WILL NOT ABANDON THEM. LATER HE ADDS, "PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU, MY PEACE I GIVE TO YOU."

REMEMBER THE OLD SPIRITUAL, "JESUS WALKED THIS LONESOME VALLEY," WHERE IN THE SECOND VERSE IT SAYS WE HAVE TO WALK THIS LONESOME VALLEY BY OURSELVES AND REPEATS THE THOUGHT IN THE THIRD VERSE. JOHN IN OUR GOSPEL READING TODAY IS SAYING JUST THE OPPOSITE. IF WE SEEK TO LIVE IN HIS LOVE AND KEEP HIS WORD, WE WILL NOT BE ALONE BUT HE WILL DWELL IN US. SOMEONE HAS WRITTEN A FOURTH VERSE FOR THAT OLD SPIRITUAL AS A PART OF AN ANTHEM. IT ADDS: WE WILL WALK THIS LONESOME VALLEY, BUT HE IS WALKING CLOSE BESIDE; OH, NEVER ALONE IN THIS DARK VALLEY, FOR HE IS WALKING BY OUR SIDE.

MY PEACE I GIVE YOU JESUS SAYS. IT MAY SEEM A STRANGE GIFT TO SPEAK IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS TALK OF LEAVING, OF DEATH, AND OF PERSECUTION. THE PEACE JESUS SPEAKS OF WOULD CONTINUE IN THE HARD DAYS AHEAD FOR THE DISCIPLES. THE HARD DAYS ALL OF HIS FOLLOWERS ENDURED. AND WITH THAT PROMISE OF PEACE THAT WOULD HOLD, CAME THE WORDS OF ASSURANCE THAT HAVE SPOKEN TO COUNTLESS SOULS THROUGH THE AGES, "DO NOT LET YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED, AND DO NOT LET THEM BE AFRAID." LIKE THE KISS OF A PARENT ON THEIR CHILD'S HURT, IT MAY NOT SOLVE ALL THE PROBLEMS, BUT IT BRINGS AN ASSURANCE THAT ALL WILL BE BETTER. JESUS WAS TELLING THEM OF THE FUTURE. HE WANTED THEM TO BE ASSURED OF HIS PRESENCE, HIS PEACE, AND HIS POWER BEFORE THEIR WORLD WAS TORN APART. HE WAS THEIR CENTER THAT WOULD HOLD IF THEY WOULD CONTINUE BELIEVING.

MY PEACE I GIVE YOU...MARTIN NIEMOELLER WAS A GERMAN LUTHERAN PASTOR WHEN THE NAZIS CAME TO POWER. AS EVIL DESCENDED ON HIS COUNTRY AND WORLD, HE DARED TO STAND IN THE PULPIT AND PUBLICLY PROCLAIM, "GOD IS MY FUHRER!" IT DID NOT TAKE LONG FOR THE GESTAPO TO ARREST HIM AND PLACE HIM IN A CONCENTRATION CAMP. BUT HE SURVIVED THE CAMP, SURVIVED HITLER, SURVIVED THE WAR. WHEN A REPORTER WENT TO INTERVIEW THE PASTOR, HE WROTE: "I MET REV. NIEMOELLER IN PASADENA JUST FOLLOWING THE SECOND WORLD WAR. I EXPECTED TO SEE A GIANT, A BRICK OF A MAN, A SAINT. WELL, HE MAY HAVE BEEN ALL THESE, BUT IN FACT HE WAS NOT LARGE IN STATURE, NOT STRIDENT, NOT VINDICTIVE. HE SEEMED TO SPEAK AND LIVE OUT OF AN INNER CENTER, SEEMED TO BE LISTENING TO ANOTHER VOICE. HE WAS THE LIVING EMBODIMENT OF WHAT HE ONCE SAID: IF YOU BELIEVE IN JESUS, YOU CAN AFFORD TO WAIT. THAT IS PEACE, A PEACE THAT CAN DEFY A TYRANT AND BE AT HOME STILL...IN THE WORLD AND WITH JESUS.

IN THE FACE OF UNCERTAINTY AND CHANGE, JESUS GIVES US PEACE. AND IT'S FAR MORE THAN WHAT WE MEAN BY PEACE BEING THE ABSENCE OF CONFLICT, MORE THAN MERE CALMNESS OR TRANQUILITY BUT RATHER A WHOLENESS THAT IS CAPTURED BY THE WORD SHALOM. UNLIKE THE WORLD THAT WOULD GIVE A PEACE THAT IS ONLY A PAUSE IN THE CONFLICT. THE GIFT THAT JESUS WOULD GIVE WOULD KEEP ON GIVING IN THE HARD DAYS AHEAD.

FREEDOM FROM ANXIETY IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO OUR PUTTING OUR WHOLE TRUST IN JESUS AND HIS PRESENCE WITH US ALWAYS.

WHILE IN FRANCE, THE POET HEINRICH HEINE AND A FRIEND WERE TOURING A STUNNINGLY BEAUTIFUL CATHEDRAL. AS THEY STOOD IN ADMIRATION BEFORE THE CHURCH, THE FRIEND SAID, "TELL ME, HEINRICH, WHY CAN'T PEOPLE BUILD LIKE THIS ANYMORE?" THE POET REPLIED, "IN THOSE DAYS PEOPLE HAD CONVICTIONS. WE MODERNS HAVE OPINIONS. IT TAKES MORE THAN OPINIONS TO BUILD GOTHIC CATHEDRALS."

WHEN THE PEACE OF CHRIST IS AT THE CENTER OF OUR LIVES, THEN WE HAVE THE STRENGTH OF OUR CONVICTIONS TO LET GO OF WHAT HAS BEEN AND TO RECEIVE THE PROMISE OF WHAT WILL BE.

LET US PRAY: GRACIOUS GOD, GIVE US THE STRENGTH OF OUR CONVICTIONS THAT WHATEVER THE STORMS OF LIFE THAT MAY SURROUND US, WE KNOW THE CENTER OF WHO WE ARE IN YOU WILL HOLD STRONG. AMEN.