

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

May 22, 2022 (6th Sunday of Easter, Year C)
John 14:23-29

One of the best newspaper cartoons of all time is Calvin and Hobbes. Early one morning, Calvin and Hobbes come marching into the living room, and his mother is sitting there in her favorite chair sipping her morning coffee. She looks up at Calvin and is amused at how he's dressed. He's wearing a large space helmet and a cape draped around his neck, down his back and dragging on the floor. One hand's holding a flashlight and the other a baseball bat.

"What's up today?" asks his mom.

"Nothing, so far," answers Calvin.

"So far?" she questions.

"Well, you never know. Something COULD happen today," Calvin says. Then he marches off, "And if anything does, by golly, I'm going to be ready for it!"

Calvin's mom looks out at the reading audience and says, "I need a suit like that!"

That's the way many of US feel lately as we watch the news and deal with life. Sometimes this world seems too violent. War, mass shootings in grocery stores and churches. And everywhere, people seem to be at each other's throats. A suit like CALVIN'S would help, so we can say WITH Calvin, "Whatever may come my way, I'm going to be ready for it! Bring it on!"

Well, I DON'T have a SUIT like Calvin's to give you this morning, but I DO have something with the SAME purpose – a word from Jesus: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. ... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. "

This is a time of TRANSITION in our community. Graduation is right around the corner for our high school seniors in Aitkin. We blessed them and prayed for them last Sunday. They're completing one journey and embarking on another. Some are going right into full-time employment. Some are continuing their studies. Some don't KNOW yet what they're going to do. But for ALL the graduates, this is a time of CHANGE. They're about to do something completely different, and that's a little scary.

But the transitions of this day don't end with the SENIORS. Parents and teachers have watched these kids grow up, and now they have to let go. They've protected them and guided them for all these years, and now they have to TRUST them as adults. Letting your children face the dangers of the world on their OWN is hard.

And OUTSIDE graduation there are transitions too. The REST of the school is about to start summer vacation. Some of the kids are HAPPY about that, and some of the kids will actually MISS school. And you parents and grandparents, SOME of you are HAPPY it's summer vacation, and maybe some of you AREN'T so happy. The kids are going to spend a lot more time at HOME now, and what are they going to DO with all that time? Summer vacation is a big CHANGE, for EVERYBODY.

And OUTSIDE school, this is a time of transition too. Have you heard the lawnmowers running for the first time? Have been in the garden getting it ready? The farmers are getting ready to get into the fields now—the start of another season. It's been rough lately, but you got to keep going, and praying that the prices will be BETTER this year. We don't really know.

This is a time of change. And change is always difficult for us. But knowing us like he did, Jesus UNDERSTOOD that. In our Gospel today, Jesus is PREPARING the disciples for a BIG change—his leaving. As I said last week, this is part of what's called the "Farewell Discourse." He's saying "GOODBYE." He knows that he's ABOUT to be betrayed. He KNOWS the suffering and death that's coming.

But in the book of John, Jesus ALSO knows that his death is ACTUALLY his greatest VICTORY. That's why we read this text in the season of EASTER. In these seven weeks, we're

learning that the resurrection is MORE than Christ's physically rising from the tomb; we're learning what Christ's being raised means for US and OUR lives.

Now, in THIS text, Just give us a PROMISE. In the MIDST of all this change, Jesus says, "My Father will love them, and we will come to them, and make our home with them." "Our HOME with them," he says. That's a STRONG word. Home is everything comfortable and familiar. It's where we feel loved and wanted, like we BELONG. And to say that WHEN he does, with SO MUCH CHANGING, Jesus is saying, "No matter WHAT happens, no matter what you do, no matter where you go, the Father and I are coming WITH you, and we'll make our HOME with you. It's gonna be okay. We're ALWAYS with you."

That's what the Advocate, the Holy Spirit is FOR. The Spirit teaches us and reminds us about our faith in Christ, and IN that faith, the Spirit gives us peace. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. ... Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

But HOLD on there! How can Jesus SAY that? Are Christians supposed to be made of iron? Are they supposed to FEEL NOTHING? And wasn't JESUS troubled? Wasn't he TROUBLED when his friend Lazarus died? Didn't he weep? Wasn't he troubled when he lamented over Jerusalem? Wasn't he troubled in the Garden of Gethsemane? "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me." Wasn't he troubled on the cross? "Father, why have you forsaken me?"

Don't misunderstand. Jesus ISN'T telling us to NOT grieve, to NOT feel ANYTHING, to not have ANY emotion. The SECOND part of that verse MATTERS – "Do not let (your hearts) be AFRAID." There are some things in this life that ARE troubling, that WILL trouble us, but do not be AFRAID. Don't LET them shake your FAITH. God's GOT this.

The CONTEXT of this verse matters too. Jesus is talking about his DEATH. If God can walk WITH us even through DEATH, then there is NOTHING that God can't redeem – no situation, no problem, no predicament, no struggle, no change, no LOSS, NOTHING that's BEYOND God's love, NOTHING that God CAN'T HOLD in his hands. God's peace can come even in the MIDST of hardship, conflict, and trouble.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."

In SPITE of what Christian books and movies often say, USUALLY when someone says that they feel "at peace," they AREN'T saying that everything is GOOD in their life. Sometimes quite the OPPOSITE. Instead, they're saying that, in the MIDST of it all, they have a sense of WHOLENESS, even RIGHTNESS, in their very being. It's a sense of harmony with the people and things around us. Peace suggests a sense of contentment, of fulfillment, a sense that, IN this moment, you're basking in God's good pleasure.

Possible Children's Message

This peace is a GIFT of God. It's something we sense most CLEARLY when we give God CONTROL of all the things that we worry about, when we recognize that there are LIMITS to what we can do or achieve on our own, when we PLACE ourselves, our loved ones, our fortunes, and our future in GOD'S hands. AS we release our GRIP on the many things we are trying to hold ONTO, we discover that's it's only with OPEN hands that can RECEIVE God's gift of peace. God wants to give us this gift, but we can't receive it with our hands holding onto something else. Peace is about being open to receive what God wants to give us. Even in those moments when we are CONVINCED that it is ALL up to us, God is STILL there, offering us HIS peace, a gift the WORLD CANNOT give.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."

He says that EVEN as he says "goodbye." But "goodbye" MEANS MORE than we think.

It's actually MEANT to be (originally WAS) a COMFORTING word. "Goodbye" is a SHORTENED form of "God be with you." (Did you know that?) In fact, the WORD for farewell in MANY languages expresses the SAME thing. The Spanish, "adios" means "to God" – meaning that our lives are in God's KEEPING. And "vaya con dios" means "go with God." Benedictions at the close of our worship are reminders that, AS we part from one another, GOD goes WITH EACH one of us."

So ALL these transitions that we're experiencing right now are times when JESUS is WITH us. When we NEED Jesus the MOST, THAT'S when he's MOST PRESENT with us. He sends his Holy

Spirit to whisper words of COMFORT into our troubled hearts. He says, “No matter WHAT happens, no matter what you do, no matter where you go, the Father and I are coming WITH you, and we’ll make our HOME with you. It’s gonna be okay. We’re ALWAYS with you. We’ve GOT this.”

We may not have an all-purpose protective suit like little Calvin’s. But it turns out, JESUS gave us something BETTER. In the midst of this CRAZY world, and YOUR HECTIC lives, and even in the midst of your PAIN, HEAR Christ’s words: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. ... Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

May it be so with you. Amen.