

Sermon for: Trinity Lutheran Church, Manilla

Guided to the Cross; Midweek Lenten Series, 2024

Sermon Text: Luke 23:44-46

Sermon Title/Theme: "Guided to Peace"

Grace to you and PEACE from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Pastor Nabil Nour describes himself as a "Palestinian Christian from Nazareth." His Arab family lived in Israel before eventually immigrating to the United States. Most importantly this Lutheran pastor describes himself as "a Christian by grace." Pastor Nour has a personal and pastoral perspective on the present Arab/Israeli conflict. Biblically Nour traces the conflict back to the children of Abraham: Isaac, the child of Sarah, and Ishmael, the child of Sarah's servant, Hagar. This area of the world was conflicted 4,000 years before Christ and continues in conflict today. Nour's Bible study on the issue concludes with the question, "How do we solve the conflict?" The answer: "Only by the power of Jesus and His grace." Peace comes through the Prince of Peace. NO Christ; NO peace; KNOW Christ; KNOW peace!

As we continue our "Guided to the Cross" Lenten series, we are "Guided to peace." Peace is hard to come by these days. That's true not only on a global scale. There are senseless shootings in school hallways and city alleys. There are verbal confrontations on playgrounds and living rooms. In addition, our schedules and life styles rob us of peace. We are busy running from one thing to another. We are surrounded by interruptions at home, work, or school. Any quiet moment we have can be instantly interrupted by our phone ringing or binging, a car honking, or a video or music playing. Solutions: put away the phone, turn off the television, re-organize the family schedule and priorities; a meditation and no-technology retreat, etc. All

these “solutions” are perhaps helpful and healthy, but we as Christians know there is a deeper kind of peace that we are craving as human beings: peace with God.

Since the entrance of sin into the world at the Garden of Eden there has been no perfect peace within families: Adam and Eve’s perfect marriage was disrupted by their fall and blame ensued; son Cain kills his brother Abel; Abraham doubts God’s timing and sons Isaac and Ishmael are in a conflict which continues today; Jacob steals the family blessing and his sons sell a brother; David’s son Absalom rebels against his father and on and on throughout the pages of the Old Testament. In all of those human dynamics, in all of those conflicts, the basic problem remained the same. Unless there was peace with God, there would be no peace in His creation.

God immediately came into the Garden with the message of peace to His first family, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” God made it clear that He would send a Savior born of a woman to reunite us to himself and crush the power of sin, death, and the devil in the process.

The promise of peace came to a broken and divided world when God sent His Son, Jesus, as a little baby born of a woman, to take on our flesh and blood as a human being. At Jesus’ birth, the angels announce to shepherds and to the world, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace.” Jesus spent his ministry telling his disciples and anyone who would listen, that he was the one who would bring the world peace. Speaking to His disciples in the Upper Room, Jesus promised, “My 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).

As Jesus went from that rather peaceful Passover setting with His disciples, the events were anything but peaceful. Judas betrays Jesus; a soldier's ear is cut off in a scuffle in the Garden of Gethsemane; Jesus is arrested and falsely accused; Peter denies Jesus; disciples abandon Jesus; Pilate gives into the political pressure of the crowd that is calling "crucify him," and then Pilate sentences the innocent Jesus to crucifixion; soldiers mock Jesus with a purple robe and a crown of thorns; Jesus is nailed to the cross among two criminals. Where is the peace that was promised in the Messiah?

Even nature is not at peace in the passion: darkness over Jerusalem; "the earth shook, rocks were split." The Gospel writer, Luke, describes the darkness from the sixth hour (noon) to the ninth hour (3 p.m.) and then, "The curtain in the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus calling out with a loud voice said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last," (Luke 23:46). And there was peace!

The tearing of the temple curtain is significant. The curtain that divided the Holy of Holies in the temple gave the message that there was a curtain between God and man. Only the designated priest offering the sacrifice could go behind that curtain. The perfect sacrifice of the Son of God had been made. The curtain was torn. There was no more separation between God and mankind. There was peace with God for all who believed.

Trinity's logo which states "Peace through the cross," is significant. Peace comes only through the cross of Jesus. It is God's message to you in this place. Families and the child reborn through baptism depart from the font with the words, "Peace be with you." We are dismissed from the Lord's Table with the words, "Depart in peace."