

This “Farewell Discourse” of Jesus is in answer to the disciples’ questions; those first disciples that John describes there in the upper room with Jesus but also the disciples John was originally writing for: the disciples of the early church about 60 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. And it’s written **for us**, disciples in the 21<sup>st</sup> century because the questions in all three points in history remain eerily similar.

The disciples are worried about how they will go on when Jesus is no longer physically present with them. They’re worried about how they will survive? How can they be faithful in a world that is not friendly to Jesus’ message and the life Jesus calls the faithful to live that is radically different than the life the culture endorses? How can they be true disciples when the culture is pulling them away, luring them into conformity with the values of the culture. These remain disciples’ questions in every age.

In the snippet we’re looking at today from Jesus long farewell speech, Jesus answers these concerns by talking about **love and peace**. When one of the disciples asks how Jesus will reveal himself to them but not to the world, Jesus’ answer is **love**: it is love that unlocks the secret of Jesus’ presence in the post-resurrection era. And Jesus mentions **peace**. Not the peace of the world but the peace that only God’s spirit can give.

So, ‘peace’ and ‘love’ are Jesus’ answer to the turmoil that the disciples are feeling, asking him for answers – how will we live when you are no longer physically present among us? How can we be faithful? What can we hold on to when we can no longer hold on to you?

And Jesus answers: **Peace and love**. That’s what we expect to talk about in church. That’s what we hope for as a result of our participation in the **life** of the church: greater peace in our hearts and maybe in the world; greater love within us and maybe between us.

So what exactly is Jesus offering as he prepares to leave his followers? What is the love he describes? What is the peace?

We can never separate Jesus’ words from his life and when we look at Jesus’ life it becomes clear that love and peace must have very little to do with living an **uneventful or quiet life**. They must even have little to do with **avoiding conflict**. Jesus was constantly running up against the church hierarchy and the governing officials. He never shied away from confronting the societal ills of his day. He overturned the tables of the money changers perverting the purpose of the synagogue. He confronted greed and oppression head on. Jesus never avoided a confrontation that gave him the chance to express God’s **true purpose** for the church and for people – to share God’s love with everyone, no exceptions!

Too often, it seems, we think of peace as simply the absence of conflict; an end to war and violence. We pray for peace all the time: peace in our hearts, peace in our homes and our neighborhoods; peace in the world especially in war-torn parts of the world.

But, looking at Jesus’ life, I think the peace Jesus offers is **more than** the absence of something negative. Jesus seems to be describing something that is a thing in itself. This peace has its **own nature and weight**. When we say we feel “at peace,” we mean something other than just an absence of conflict. It’s more like a sense of what we’ve named ‘shalom’: wholeness, and rightness. It’s a sense of harmony with people and things around us. Peace conveys a sense of

contentment, and fulfillment, a sense that **in this moment** we are basking in God's pleasure.

**That peace** can come even in the **midst** of pain, or struggle, or conflict; even in the midst of war. Jesus promised us **THAT** peace.

So, what about love? What is the love that Jesus names? He equates love with "keeping" his word and that "keeping" his word leads to God coming to live in us. This phrase, "keeping his word" has been distorted to mean obeying the commandments as if Jesus gives us a checklist; if we mark the right boxes we're loving Jesus: Don't murder. Check. Don't steal. Check. Keep the Sabbath. Well, check sometimes, when it's convenient.

What does it **mean** to "keep" Jesus' word?

The basic meanings of the word 'keep' in Greek are:

1. to keep watch over, or guard
2. to hold, reserve, or preserve someone or something
3. to not lose
4. to protect
5. to observe, fulfill, or pay attention to

Note that "**obey**" is not one of the meanings. It could be implied by 'observe.' One commentator that I like settled on paraphrasing "keep" as to "hold dear."

In this sense when we "keep" God's word we're going **beyond** obedience. We can hate what someone says but still obey them. We can hate the one giving us orders but still obey to avoid being punished. But, Jesus is asking his disciples, us, to "**Hold Jesus' word dear.**" He asks us to cherish his Word and the one who gives it to us. Jesus wants us to hear and obey out of love for him and for the one who sent him.

Loving Jesus and "holding dear" what Jesus said and did are inseparable. Not as a list of requirements to be checked off but as a way of life. We don't murder because life is a gift from God which means we also don't murder anyone's character through gossip or even expecting the worst of them.

We don't steal because God has provided us with life and talent and energy to **contribute** to the world not take from others. But, because we 'hold dear' God's word we also don't steal or take anything from anyone in a dishonest way; and not only that, but as Martin Luther wrote, "We help them to **improve and protect** their possessions and income." So, in our world, one form of 'not stealing' is not taking advantage of people in other parts of the world who because they have no other options, will work all day for \$1. We think about what is fair not only for ourselves but for those impacted by our actions and we think about the effects of our actions on the earth. That is what it means to 'hold dear' God's word that tells us not to steal: not checking off the ways we fulfill the letter of the law, but trying to live in a way that embraces the intent because we cherish Jesus and his word.

So, 'love and peace' in this sense are bigger and more complex than could ever be contained within a checklist. They are the work of our lives and more than we can ever completely **accomplish** in our lives. So, a couple of things need to be said about how we can do this; how we can live in this love and peace that Jesus promises are our inheritance.

First, this love cannot be lived alone. This love requires being connected with others who are responding to Jesus' love. This love is not a feeling. It is belonging with others who 'hold dear'

God's Word, always remembering that the most important expression of God's word is Jesus. Remembering that the gospel of John begins with: The Word became flesh and made his home among us.

We have seen his glory,  
glory like that of a father's only son,  
full of grace and truth.

We hold dear the word, especially the word that is Jesus! And in that connection with others we **live into love.**

Secondly, this peace is not something **we** create. This peace doesn't begin in me or even between you and me. This peace begins in God's heart and is always simply received as a gift from God to us. It is ours to receive, to cultivate, to share, but it is not ours to create."

As we live together, pray together, serve together, as we receive God's love and peace into our lives together we then express that love and peace of God to each other and into the world. And when we do that, we begin to see God at work healing, bringing hope, creating relationships that transcend differences. God's peace is God's action, not ours.

This peace Jesus offers begins inside of us but it's lived out between us. We feel this peace most clearly when we let go of trying to control all the things that we worry about. Not that we surrender responsibility, but we recognize there are limits to what we can do on our own and in that recognition we give ourselves, our loved ones, and our future over to God. And God's response is to give us peace. A peace that allows us to **look beyond** the troubles that overwhelm us long enough to see the people around us as God's gifts given us to love to share this life with. Jesus gives a peace **different** than what the world offers. Jesus gives freely, with no expectation of anything in return, only the hope that, transformed by this peace, we will pass it on, giving others the gift we have received.

How many of you need, or want **this peace, REAL peace, the kind of peace** that Jesus offers? Do you crave this peace enough to open your hands and your hearts to receive it? Can you let go of seeking or grasping for this peace and let God pour it into you? It is only as we release our grip on all the things we are grasping for that we can begin to receive God's gift of peace. This isn't a test. It isn't another box to be checked. Letting go and receiving are some of the hardest things Jesus asks us to do.

But even in the times when we **can't let go**; when our hands are tightly closed gripping the things we're trying to control, even when we are convinced that it is all up to us, **even then** God is still there, offering us **God's** peace, a gift the world cannot give.

So now, how about closing your eyes, opening your hands and just resting for a moment in God's pleasure, trusting that God loves you and wants to use you for good. Rest in the truth that you are God's beloved! Hear the truth that God loves you just as you are and loves you too much to let you remain in your pain.

God is good. God loves you; the real you you keep hidden. God loves you and offers you peace, real peace that surpasses all understanding.

Now let's share that peace. Turn and bless those around you with that same gift, using simple, heartfelt words, "the **peace of Christ** be with you."

Jesus gives us peace in a way that surpasses all understanding. As you receive that peace go out and share it with everyone. Amen.