



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA

Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick

Mid Week Lenten Worship April 10, 2019

Sermon Title: "Learning Peace"

Texts: Psalm 34:11-14 and John 12:1-8

Over these weeks of Lent, we've been considering Scripture through the lens of the watch word, "Seek Peace and Pursue it" in Psalm 34. In our psalm today we hear, "Come, children and listen to me. I will teach you... which one of you desires life and covets many days to enjoy good?" Of course, all of us do. The psalmist recognizes this reality and in fact never criticizes our search for fulfillment, instead presupposing these hopes and fears. But as John Calvin noted, while "everyone earnestly desires happiness... how comes it to pass that scarcely anyone sets out to find it, and that everyone by his or her own fault brings on troubles?"

In his book, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Stanley Hauerwas notes that "often when we say we want peace, we really want order. In fact, it is our great deception. We are peaceable as long as no one disturbs our illusions. Not violent as long as no one challenges our turf. We have decided what makes is necessary for life to be good in our eyes. It shapes who we listen to and how we respond.

As we gather at Lazarus' house with his sisters, Mary and Martha and the disciples, we see that as Jesus is preparing to head to Jerusalem, there will be a clash of visions. What kind of victory will Jesus bring? What kind of power? As they have been laying low, with death threats in the air, there is plenty of room for disagreement about illusions. And for a moment I want us to set aside frankly what seems like John excitedly telling us what evil Judas will perpetrate. Because there is enough in this scene without the parentheses. Enough in this clash- "Mary anoints the feet of Jesus with a costly ointment..."

Judas asks "Why didn't we sell this so we could do some real ministry for the poor?" It's a clash of visions, and the struggle to be open to others without fear or resentment. Judas asks a question we too might ask- "was this the best thing you could do?" It looks like "doing nothing." I'm "doing nothing" is how we can perceive those actions which seem to have no clear constructive results. We can all feel empowered and moral even by believing we have the answers to the problems of the world. To deal with hunger, to institute our view of justice or "freedom."

**And there are so many messages that try to teach us how the world should be, but also often attended by sowing deceit, discord and fear of the “others.” Judas is not asking the wrong question. He is seeking the wrong source for the answer to life.**

**Surely Judas and those who were the zealots, had been steeped in believing that after an endless occupation by the Romans, and the terrorizing it took to keep “peace by force,” it takes power at the top. We must wrestle it from others for a better vision. In and of itself the desire for life is a good one. But it was and is still hard to imagine this happening without falling into mirroring the very patterns from which we seek to escape.**

**God’s word offers us the wisdom about the things truly ought to work. That “fear of the Lord” of which the psalm speaks, recognizing the reality of God for salvation and shaping our everyday life in worship. “Such a peace may often appear to “do nothing” because it so radically challenges our presuppositions of our world order and our role...but, “our only hope is in the presence of the other, through which God makes present the kingdom in which we are invited to find our lives.” (Hauerwas)**

**Mary has found her life in the presence of her Lord, a life opened by God, and recently quite dramatically so in the opening of the tomb of her brother. “The good or joy we can come to know is found in letting go of the slim reed of security we think provides us with the power to control our own lives and the lives of others. This illusion of security and power are the breeding ground of violence.”**

**By the time Mary pours out her life’s savings, she is pouring out her self in a vision of what peace needs in the moment. What might it mean to pour out our illusions for the sake of real peace? For Mary, the anointing brings peace both for herself and for him. Even in the face of having to explain herself. Surely Judas simply models that concern for us all. To be lured into the world of peace requires a transformation of our imagination, that starts with the assurance that Jesus has made God’s peace a present reality, unfolding moment by moment.**

**The psalmist would remind us that life and good come from the God who has done great things, and continues to do so even when we have aching doubts. The one thing we are asked to do is to be faithful. Not to try to do everything and fall into the trap’s laid by evil in our intentions.**

**To seek what alters our lives and draws us deeper into a peaceable kingdom. To live patiently even in the face of the tragic, and to see the simplest and common aspects of our existence- our family, friends, and our Lord are things we have no right to expect but which have been lavished upon us anyway.**

**But we have to allow ourselves to be taught. This is another of the lessons of Mary of Bethany- she allows herself to be taught. In Luke, she sits at Jesus’ feet listening to what he said, even when to others it looks like she is doing “nothing helpful.” In John when Lazarus has died, and Jesus arrives, even Martha grasps it as she tells Mary “the Teacher is here.” Mary immediately goes to him to make sense of what looks like fear and death and the unknown. Jesus teaches about rising again, but then made space for teaching a second way- by weeping. Jesus weeps at the tragic. Then Jesus teaches her death doesn’t win, God’s peace and love do. For Mary and for us, the source which gives us life is this reality of Christ.**

**From here, in the journey of Holy Week, Jesus will echo her, by pouring out himself, with a basin and a towel and servanthood. And then, on the cross in what seems far from victory, but will be the ultimate lesson in peace. In our world where this is not fully seen, we are called to continue to sit with Jesus, to walk with Jesus and to serve him. May the word made flesh ever teach us to ground our hope in believing God’s peace beyond understanding as God’s reality and desire for our lives.**