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First UMC

Springboro, Ohio

April 17, 2016

Series: “The Gifts of Easter”

Message: “The Gift of Peace”

Scripture: John 14:15-27

 During this Easter season, we are taking some time to unpack and to better understand the gifts of Easter—those gifts that we receive in a more profound way because of the resurrection of Jesus.

 Last week we looked at the gift of truth. We talked about Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life and that if we stick with him in a close relationship, he will lead us through the most difficult times in our lives.

 This week we continue in the 14th chapter of John as we look at the gift of peace. As we look at these gifts of Easter, we are using as a guide, a section from the gospel of John, chapters 13-17 that is called the Farewell Discourse. These are the words of comfort and instruction that Jesus gave to the disciples on the Thursday night before he was crucified.

 Now it might seem strange at first to use these words as a guide to think about the gifts of Easter. Wouldn’t we want to use the stories from after the resurrection? Why are we going back to these pre-resurrection words now?

 We do this because it is most likely what the disciples were doing. It’s what we as human beings tend to do.

 When we are the one leaving or teaching others such as our children to do something on their own, we give all sorts of instructions. We worry over them and try to prepare them. We leave emergency instructions and talk to those who might be there in our place.

 When we are on the other side though, when we are the ones being left behind or taught to do something on our own, we often can’t really take it all in. It doesn’t seem quite real. We don’t understand what really goes into it ahead of time. We think we know what we will do and that it will all be fine. In other words, we don’t really listen.

 Even when we’re trying to listen, we just don’t have a context for it. It’s not part of what we have experienced.

 But then the time comes when that situation actually happens, then those are exactly the words that you need to hear.

 And then you go back and you hear them again, replaying them over and over in your mind, trying to figure them out, trying to glean all of the information that you need from them. Those words that you weren’t particularly interested in become your life line for understanding, coping, moving on and living now.

 These words that Jesus said to prepare the disciples for his death, resurrection, and ascension are like that. They take on much greater meaning after the resurrection. Now they and we have a context for understanding and applying what he was talking about.

 So today we continue on with John 14, picking up where we left off last week. Jesus continues to talk about having a relationship with him and sticking close to him, even after his death, resurrection and ascension.

 And then he shares these beautiful words, words that again we often hear at funerals, and yet are even more profound and far reaching than that:

 “My 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.”

 Jesus gives the gift of peace. And the profound thing about it is that he gives them this gift before he is crucified. He gives it to them just before the worst days that they and all of humanity would ever experience.

 So often we think of peace as the absence of conflict or war or stress. But in this moment we realize that this peace is not the absence of these things, but it is the presence of something else. It is the presence of that which is able to help you persevere and to have faith and hope even in the darkest moments of life.

 David Lose talks about it this way. He says that it “doesn’t take away the difficult things in life, it just keeps them from dominating, from having mastery, from defining who I am and the possibilities around me.”

 Jesus gives us this gift. But like any gift, we have to ask, have we truly received it? Are we truly using it well? Or is it somewhere on a shelf in its original packaging gathering dust?

 Let’s look at what this gift includes. First, we find peace in the assurance that we are not alone. Even as Jesus tells them these hard words that he has to leave them, he says that they will not be alone. He will send them another advocate. This advocate, the Holy Spirit, will be like him and will always be with them.

 Think of those moments in life when you have experienced deep loneliness. Maybe it was after a death or another sort of loss, or even after a good change in life. Suddenly that one person who you could always count on isn’t there.

 But Jesus says that he will send his Spirit, this Holy Spirit, to be with them. They will not be orphans. They will not be alone.

 We find a deep peace, even in our loneliest moments when we realize and claim the gift of the Holy Spirit’s presence with us. It is there with us as our advocate. An advocate is that friend who is on your side, that you can always trust, the one who sticks up for you, speaks up for you, who has your back and who will never leave you.

 The advocate also helps us to do what Jesus has commanded us. And that is the second thing that Jesus talks about that gives us this gift of peace.

 Peace comes from doing what Jesus has commanded. In other words, when we follow Jesus instructions, we find peace. His clear commandment in chapter 13:34 is to “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

 So our question in every situation, in every decision is, “What does the love of Jesus call me to do here?”

 It means that we won’t harm each other, but we will stick with each other and serve each other. We will be faithful to each other and forgive each other.

 And when we do this, even when others don’t, when they aren’t being very lovable or faithful or gracious, we still find peace. So much of our external conflict comes from a lack of internal peace. We know we’ve hurt others and the guilt and the judgment and the self-justification just deepen the hurt. Or, they have hurt us and so we respond with even more hurtful and awful actions which never make us feel better but destroy our peace and our soul.

 But when we stick close to Jesus, when we follow his instructions and love in the way that he loves regardless of whether the other person deserves it or not, but because we are being obedient to him and his instruction, we will find peace.

 Janet Hunt talks about the interconnection between love and peace as she shares her favorite saying, “Breathe in peace, breathe out love.”

 When we love well, like Jesus, we find peace. And when we have peace in our hearts, we will love well.

 This peace is a strong foundation that stays firm even in the most troubling of times. It is a peace that passes all understanding. It doesn’t make sense. But that’s what Jesus says, “I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

 Today I invite you to receive this profound gift of peace, to live it, to let it sink into and cover all of those places of fear, loneliness, discontent, hurt, guilt. I invite you to make peace with God and with others, and with those situations that are out of your control.

 Peace comes from faith in the resurrected Christ, from knowing that the Holy Spirit is always with you, and from following his instruction to love as he has loved us.