

Not As the World Gives

Acts 16: 9-15

John 14: 23-29

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Acts 16: 9-15

During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

John 14: 23-29

Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me. I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 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.

You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

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The original seal of Massachusetts Bay Colony showed a naked American 'Indian' with a bush covering his groin. Just like the current seal in which he wears a tunic, in his hand he held an arrow pointed down, which signifies peace. A scroll came out over his mouth with the words "Come over and help us." This quotation is believed to have come from Acts 16:9: During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

This initial seal was meant to emphasize both the peaceful missionary and commercial intentions of the original colonists. Yet with even the most basic knowledge of American history we know that the concept of peaceful missionary and commercial intentions did not happen. The invitation portrayed as the natives' request was by far the colonists' perception. There could have been some truth to the idea of the natives' invitation as they could see some benefits of working together with those seeking a new life, a very different life from what they had left behind across the Atlantic.

There may also have been some truth in Paul's vision – people in Macedonia may have wanted help from the cult members they referred to critically and unfavorably as Christians – but it seems unlikely. Christianity in Paul's day was not held in high esteem in any way, nor was it seen as a source of truth, intelligence, wisdom or comfort. Historians called it “a new and mischievous superstition” and the emperor Nero punished believers with death. Throughout Paul's many letters he spoke often about the widespread distrust and hostility toward this new religion claiming to be centered around a crucified and risen rabbi and healer from Nazareth.

Jews disparaged the first Jewish Christians as rejecting their ancestral faith. Romans and Greeks saw Christianity as a kind of crazy cult that caught fire among slaves and women as they were considered the most gullible people of their day. They were uneducated outsiders who could not know any better. Without a male head of the household to teach them the ancient traditions passed down through the generations, they could not know what faith, what religion, truly was. Slaves and women were easy prey, low hanging fruit, for itinerant preachers and teachers like Paul and his companions. They were easily susceptible to the foolish talk of love and peace, of healing and miracles, of the joy and impossibility of resurrection, of the poor being blessed and the meek inheriting the earth.

The gullible outsiders were trying to escape the way the world worked---and works still. Toughness, not meekness, brings success. Strength, not weakness, brings success. Dominance, not peace, brings success. It's about showing your enemies who's boss, not about loving them – that's ridiculous. The world is a place of competition and hustle, a place of trouble and fear, it is not a place of peace.

It would be more likely then that Lydia and not the man of Macedonia would have been welcoming and receptive to Paul's teaching about Jesus. Lydia was a merchant in purple cloth, which means she ran a luxury item business. She was privileged and educated. She moved in moneyed circles which means she'd made her way in a man's world, and she knew all that entailed. Even with--and because of--her success she was an outsider. She was an outsider among male business owners, and among women who did not have her knowledge or financial comfort. With all that she had she was an outsider, and she found truth in Paul's lessons on the peace that Jesus offers as that is where the peace of Christ is found – among the outsiders. It's not with the insiders – the old boys clubs, the exclusive and elite, the-win-at-all-costs competitors, but with the outsiders of the world, those who know pain, loss, struggle, hunger, war, racism, ableism, ageism, rejection, illness, discrimination, despair, grief, injustice and trials. It is the outsiders, the ones who do not take love, peace, grace and blessings for granted, who hear the gospel's good news.

Jesus promised, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and *we* will come to them and make our home with them... But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 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 promised us an astonishing presence that does not abandon us in this broken, unloving world. This presence is a peace anchored in him, in God, in the Holy Spirit, not in the peace the world gives that is momentary, unstable and fleeting.

Jesus promised us an advocate, the Holy Spirit, as a gift of peace. Jesus offered his disciples, his followers, peace ---the peace only he could give and the peace that the world cannot take away. That peace comes from living his way and playing by his rules. Jesus' peace does not come from playing by the world's rules. This is the peace Jesus left with us. Not a false

peace of protection and immunity from the world's difficulties, but a peace in the assurance of the presence, comfort and love of God when we are troubled and afraid, a peace that bears us up and encourages us. It is a peace that sits with us in our lament and anger when there is yet another mass shooting, and in the face of systemic racism, and in the midst of the world's poverty, violence and suffering. It is a peace that propels us to move beyond the emotions to work for justice, restoration and healing.

The world gives peace after power by insiders and by dividing into winners and losers. We have waged wars across the history of the world and in between settled into unsettled, fragile peacetimes. WWI was optimistically called 'the war to end all wars,' yet that peace barely lasted two decades. After WWII, we signed "peace" treaties –but then came wars in Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, the Soviet Union, China, Rwanda, Serbia, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and now the horrors, devastation and trauma in Ukraine continues. That's the way the world gives peace after we have destroyed lives, families, communities and centuries of human achievements.

Jesus's peace is different. His peace comes from working for God's realm rather than clinging to the passing politics and powers for which we kill and die, for which we overlook the needs of those considered outsiders. His peace comes giving rather than grabbing. His peace comes from losing one's life for his sake in order to gain one's life for eternity. His is the peace that the world can neither give nor take away. It is the peace that passes all understanding.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Let not your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." The peace of Christ comes over and helps us. Amen.