

"Pathways to Peace"

April 25, 2004

Acts 9:1-20 & John 21:1-19

Once, an elderly bishop paid a visit to Saint Mary's church in Oxford, the University church. He met an even more elderly verger whom he recognized from his days as an undergraduate. The bishop and the old verger remembered together their years in the church and all the change they had seen. As they talked the verger said, "I have much to be thankful for. You know, your grace, I have listened to every sermon preached in this church for fifty years - and thank God, I am still a Christian!"

Now on to the sermon

There was an article that I read this week which talked about how popular the name "Paco" is in Spain. The article claimed that Earnest Hemingway was reflecting on this fact as he told about an ad that appeared in a local newspaper. The ad simply read: "Paco, meet me at the Hotel Montana at noon on Wednesday. All is forgiven. Love Papa!" When Wednesday noon came the police had to call in a squad of officers when 800 "Pacos" showed up at the hotel. ---- Now, it may be fascinating that so many parents name their sons Paco in Spain. But it seems far more amazing to me that at least 800 men in one place and time were all at odds with their fathers and desperately longing for forgiveness.

As much as I love the theme at Camp Metigoshe for this summer which reminds us that "LIFE IS GOOD", we all know that life is not always easy. There is so much that sets us off – so much that makes us uneasy. Although relationships are not the only thing that we struggle with, they certainly are a major factor in what goes into making our lives less than peaceful at times.

I think of Saul in our first reading for today. He had a very clear understanding of what was right and wrong in His world. He was a deeply devout, religious man and he believed that there was a great threat to his church that came from the followers of a new sect call "The Way". I think of how distraught Saul had to have been by the whole thing to set about persecuting and putting to death those who were upsetting him and his church. He could find no peace.

And I think about Peter in our Gospel reading today. He had left everything to follow Jesus. He had spent 3 years of his life walking with Him and learning from Him until he came to the point when he would tell Jesus that he would never leave Him even if it would mean giving up his own life. But then Peter denied Jesus three times and watched as Jesus was lead away and was crucified. I can hardly imagine what kind of turmoil he must have been experiencing now as he waited to figure out the next steps in his life. He had seen the risen Christ. He had struggled with what all of this meant and I am sure that he had not gotten it all figure out. I am sure that he just did not know what to believe. But I am also sure that He agonized over his repeated denial of the one he had professed as the Messiah - the one he had followed and loved.

Life is indeed good — but many times it is not easy. Many times we long for things to change but they do not. Many times we wish the situations that shape our lives would be different - but they are what they are. How are we to find peace in this good life that God has given to us?

There is a site on the Internet that I would like you to see. It is entitled, "Pathways to Peace". It is located at www.pathways-to-peace.com

"Integrity is one of several paths. It distinguishes itself from the others because it is the right path and the only one upon which you will never get lost." - M.H. McKee

"If the sight of the blue skies fills you with joy, if the simple things of nature have a message that you understand, rejoice, for your soul is alive." - Eleonora Duse

"Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see." - Mark Twain
"Faith is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into the light." - Helen Keller

"This is courage... to bear unflinchingly what heaven sends." - Euripedes
"Hope is faith holding out its hand in the dark." - George

"We must not only give what we have; we must also give what we are." - Desire- Joseph Mercier

"I have found the paradox that if I love until it hurts, then there is no hurt, but only more love." - Mother Teresa

"Never think that God's delays are God's denials. Hold on, Hold fast, Hold out. Patience is genius."

"The great thing in this world is not so much where we are, but in what direction we are moving." - Oliver Wendell Holmes

"A single grateful thought raised to heaven is the most perfect prayer." - Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

"Pride is concerned with who is right. Humility is concerned with what is right." - Ezra Taft Benson

"Forgiveness is the answer to the child's dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is again made clean." - Dag Hammarskjold

"We must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal we seek, but it is a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means." - Martin Luther King, Jr.

So many of the quotes used in the presentation are very meaningful and I would encourage you to visit the site and considered each of them. But today I just want you to consider "Forgiveness" as a critical pathway to peace.

Paul received it as Ananias came to him in his blindness and addressed him as 'brother;. He received it as Christians that he had come to arrest and persecute received him into their midst in Damascus. — Peter experienced it as the same Jesus whom he had denied knowing in the most critical moments of Jesus' life comes to him three times to ask of his live - never condemning - but sending him out again into the mission field. As I read the stories I can feel the peace that comes to both Paul and Peter in the forgiveness received. And forgiveness is what we are called to offer and receive as we seek peace in a life that God wants to be so very good for us.

AMEN