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North Kildonan Mennonite Church

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Peace I leave with you

John 14:27

For our sermon on the day we focus on the ministry of Camps with Meaning and the contributions that people from our church made to that ministry this past summer, I take you to the verse that was the foundation for the Bible teaching that happened at our camps this summer. That verse, John 14:27, gives us words of Jesus that were intended to communicate comfort and encouragement to his followers who were worried about life with Jesus no longer around. In that verse, Jesus said to them, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” Let’s spend some minutes thinking about what Jesus meant and what implications that had for his followers some two thousand years ago and for us who also live without the physical presence of Jesus with us.

I think that the first thing to note as we wonder about what Jesus meant when he said that he would leave peace with his followers is the context in which he said those words. In the first verse that was read as part of our text this morning, John 13:33, Jesus told his disciples that he would be with them only a little longer. He would be going away, and his disciples would not be able to go where he was going. That led to a discussion between Jesus and his disciples about what it meant that Jesus would go away. It seems clear that the disciples were worried about how life would be when Jesus went away. Several times in the discussion, Jesus told the disciples to not let their hearts be troubled. It would be okay. Observing that context for the theme verse that has Jesus telling his disciples that he will leave his peace with them suggests that Jesus is talking about something that will address their anxiety. Their inner sense of anxiety will be quieted because they have the peace of Jesus. It seems to me that Jesus offering his disciples these calming words and the promise of a presence that will guide them through worry encourages us today as well. We live in a world that produces anxiety for us. We wonder about ethical decisions and what is right or wrong. We wonder about how our society can work its way through the need to bring healing and reconciliation to race relations. We wonder about the future effects of climate change. All of this and much more can produce anxiety for us. The words of Jesus to his disciples that he is leaving his peace speaks to that anxiety and encourages us to rest and trust in the care of God while also addressing what we can regarding the issues that produce anxiety.

When Jesus told his disciples that he would leave his peace with them, he was tying it to the coming of the Holy Spirit. Twice in the verses we read for this morning, Jesus spoke of God sending a Counselor to be with the disciples. The words that Jesus spoke made it clear that he was talking about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s guiding, teaching, and comforting presence were what would lead to peace for the disciples of Jesus. I believe that continues to be true for us today. This was the emphasis of the fifth day of the Bible curriculum at camp this summer. Campers went home with the idea that the peace that God was giving them came by the Holy Spirit. You can go home with that assurance today as well.

But we’re going to think about a few more ideas before you go home. Campers at Camps with Meaning this summer were encouraged to think about the peace that Jesus leaves as doing more than addressing our worries and fears. On day one, campers were encouraged to think about the way that the peace of Jesus within them leads them to love their enemies and their neighbors. When we ask about what Jesus leaving his peace with us means, we recognize that the peace that Jesus taught included the peace that comes because we choose to offer love to people who behave as enemies to us. It’s not hard to understand that responding to people who seem like enemies and to our neighbors with acts of love leads to relationships that are peaceful. The peace that Jesus leaves with us includes that.

On day two, the campers heard encouragement to live lives that include confession, reconciliation, and forgiveness. I think we can readily agree that our lives are more peaceful when we confess ways that we hurt each other and look for forgiveness and reconciliation or when we respond to others’ confessions with forgiveness. We recognize that the teaching of Jesus about human relationships encouraged living in ways of confession, forgiveness and reconciliation. The peace that he was leaving with his followers would have included such living.

On day three, the campers were encouraged to stand up against injustice. That seems like a big idea for young campers. It probably seems like a big idea for us, too. Who are we, as individuals and as relatively powerless people to stand against injustice? While we might aske that question, we can recognize that every act of speaking or acting against injustice being perpetrated on people contributes to a society in which people find greater peace. We also recognize that Jesus declared that his mission on earth included exactly such actions and that he called for his followers to continue that mission.

Jesus said, “My peace I give to you.” When he spoke of peace, he used a word that communicated the Hebrew idea of the word, shalom. That word communicated much more than an absence of conflict. It communicated a broad sense of well-being. Jesus said that he would leave his disciples with a great sense of well-being. And that would happen because following the Holy Spirit’s lead would result in less anxiety, more peaceful relationships, and a better response to injustice. May we, like this summer’s campers at Camps with Meaning, go home with the encouraging notion that the peace of which Jesus spoke is ours and with the challenging notion that Jesus calls us to work toward this peace. Receive the peace of Jesus.