

First, I must say it is truly a joy to worship and to be with you all today. For those who might not know, I grew up in this congregation, so it is a delight to be back home. As a faith family, let us now listen to what God might be telling us today.

Our Gospel reading today comes from the book of John. This book identifies Jesus' use of familial language as he described his relationship with God. This book also draws readers' attentions to the presence of the Holy Spirit. And, in this particular text, the author soulfully tells of one Jesus' last moments here on earth - his goodbye to the disciples. Right after Judas (not Judas Iscariot, just to be clear) asks Jesus the question: "Lord, why are you about to reveal yourself to us and not to the world?", is where our text today begins - John 14, verses 23-29. Listen now for the Word of the Lord.

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 (the word) 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 (will) remind you of all that I have said to you. (PAUSE)

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."

This is the Word of God, for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

Words.

They are all around us. Words fill the air, our papers, our screens, and, if you are like me, many of them fill your head at what seems like the exact same time, at any moment.

Words.

In Worship today, many of us have heard words, spoken words, sung words, and, it is my hope, believed at least some of the words in this space.

If I have learned anything in seminary thus far, it is that words help us be in relationship with the world around us, and these relationships cross time and space.

"Those who love me will keep my word", Jesus tells us in our Scripture today. And as I reflected on these words from the book of John, I then began to reflect on the words that we choose to use.

A few years ago, I had the incredible opportunity of attending the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators Annual Event. At this conference, I participated in a workshop led by an incredible Christian Educator in the PC(USA) denomination - Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka. This workshop focused on the language we use in our day-to-day lives as well as the language we use in the Church - how the words we say can be helpful, but, sometimes, our words can be harmful.

I am going to take a wild guess and assume many of you are familiar with the children's saying that goes a little something like this:

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

This saying, familiar to many, holds a new meaning to me, after Rodger discovered a new spin on that children's saying and shared it with us in his workshop that day. He said: (*VERY SLOW*)

“Sticks and stones may break my bones
But words can also hurt me.
Sticks and stones break only skin,
While words are ghosts that haunt me.”

Words.

In a world full of words that promote destruction and violence and hatred and isms that cause division. In a society full of words that create anxiety and say to each of us “You are not good enough!”. These words that we hear and see all around us fill our hearts and our minds, and they have a lasting impact in our memories.

The poem Rodger shared with us continues...

“Pain from words has left its scar
On mind and heart that's tender.

Cuts and bruises now have healed,
It's words that I remember."

And it got me thinking - Are the words we share with one another words of love? Are they words of care? Are they words of peace? As people of faith, do the words we say to each other reflect those of the Divine? "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." the Divine tells us, reminds us, and inspires us to trust, and then encourages us to share this peace with the people around us. Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis reflects on our Scripture text today. She beautifully writes: "This is Jesus at his most pastoral. This is Jesus as pastor, friend, mentor, teacher, lover, and speaking to every emotion that accompanies such relationships."¹ (PAUSE)

Friends, Jesus is often described as one that is not only saying words of peace, but He is also described as one who lived out peace. Grammatically, peace may be a noun; but the Trinity calls us to live out peace as a verb. This peace, that is talked about in our text today, is meant to be lived and embodied and put into action.

¹ Lewis, Karoline M. *John*. Fortress Press, 2014.

Rev. Dr. Anna Carter Florence is one of my preaching professors at Columbia Theological Seminary and she has become a great mentor to me. Last year in our preaching class, she brilliantly taught a lesson that captured my mind and my soul - this lesson was all about verbs. "Verbs", I thought, "what weird words?". This particular type of word gives us detail into what is going on within a text, but verbs also provide underlying messages, giving us further insight into what is *really* going on. In this text, peace, although it is a noun itself, is surrounded by verbs, which give us a better understanding of its purpose and our call. What are the verbs surrounding our ideas of "peace" today? Do we withhold peace, ignore peace, turn on the news and forget what this word "peace" means at all? What verbs describe how we embody and live out this word - "peace"? Do we share peace, hear peace, remind others of God's peace, keep peace, teach peace, send out in peace? The verbs that are scattered throughout this text in the book of John encourage us to live lives of peace - by being mindful of the peace that comes from the Divine and to then share that peace with one another. "Peace" does not flourish into its fullness, until it is lived out, until it is partnered with verbs that encourage us of our calling and remind us of the promise from the Divine.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” Jesus said to the disciples, and still says to us today. In this verse, the verb changes, did you notice it? This peace that comes from the Trinity is not just left, but, Jesus clarifies, it is given. Peace, my friends, is not some leftover, but it is a **gift** from God. Furthermore, Jesus exclaims “MY peace”, this peace is personal, it’s a gift full of purpose and intention. Peace - it’s an impactful word, full of connotations and implications and associations. This peace that comes from God, this peace is what we are then called to put into action, this peace is something that the Holy Spirit reminds us and then encourages us to remind one another has no limits. Everytime we gather together in Worship, we acknowledge and proclaim this peace - through words shared at the font, at the table, and in the pews. We then leave this place, knowing that this peace that comes from the Divine is not bound within the walls of this Church. This peace, the peace we are called to hear, say, read, sing, teach, share, and remember, extends to all and it extends to our everyday lives. This peace that Jesus talks about, lives out, and calls us to share, is full and it is abundant. Being mindful of how the words are in relationship with each other in this text provides insight about the lives we live, and the lives we are called to live.

And throughout our lives, may we always remember those beautiful words from the Divine - "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.". May we be mindful to share words of peace with one another, extending God's peace to the world we live in. And may we live lives of peace, remembering our individual and communal call to put peace into action. Amen.

Focus: *Do the words we say, and, therefore, embody, share God's peace?*

Function: *To encourage listeners to embody and live out this word of "peace", just as the Divine calls us to do.*

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Charge and Benediction: Friends, how is God calling you to live a life of peace? As we all discern this call, may the God of peace be with you, the Christ who embodied peace lead you, and the Holy Spirit who continuously reminds us of peace go with you, this day and every day. Amen.