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Peace-Filled Promises for Troubled Hearts

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TEXT: John 14:22-27 (ESV)

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Dear friends,

The desire for peace is something God has planted in every human heart. And so, we long for peace in our world. We want peace in our relationships with others as well. And we long for peace and quiet after a chaotic day. We desire peace of mind, and we talk of needing peace and a sense of inner calm in our hearts as we face the challenges of life. But because of the brokenness of our world, peace has proven to be an elusive thing for many. There are so many things that rob us of our peace and cause us to be troubled and afraid. For instance, there are tough circumstances that come our way, or there are people who make our lives difficult. There's busyness and heavy demands upon us, negative news from the social media. Many have anxieties about the future and what it holds not only for us, but our children and our grandchildren.

One of the major peace busters in many people's lives is loneliness, a feeling of being left behind to fend for yourself. Actress Anne Hathaway is quoted as saying, "Loneliness is my least favorite thing about life. The thing that I'm most worried about is just being alone without anybody to care for or someone who will care for me." Mother Teresa describes loneliness with these words. "Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty." Loneliness can occur at a time when we experience a loss in our lives – maybe after the death of a spouse, that house can feel terribly empty and quiet and lonely, and you find yourself wondering, how am I going to go on without this person? We were a team, but now I feel alone. And I can't even imagine the loneliness being experienced by those children in Ukraine who have lost parents in the war. Now they are orphans. There's loneliness as we face change in our lives – moving to a new location where you don't know anyone. I remember the loneliness I experienced the first days of college, a thousand miles away from my hometown. Perhaps you've had an experience like that yourself. Loneliness can happen when we're feeling excluded and ignored by others, or when we're going through times of suffering or defeat.

Well, Jesus addresses this particular peace-stealer called loneliness in our story for today from John's Gospel. What he says is intended to fill our anxious hearts and minds with his peace. We find Jesus with his disciples in the upper room of a home somewhere in Jerusalem. It's the night before he would be crucified on a cross. He has told them that he would soon be leaving for them – it was a real bombshell. Of course, they were panicked and troubled by this disturbing announcement. After all, they had invested three years of their lives following Jesus, enjoying a friendship with him, and they did not like the idea of that relationship ending. And besides that, now they seem to be left holding the bag, so to speak, of carrying on the mission that they'd started with him. Now he was leaving them. Imagine the thoughts that raced through their heads and the panic in their eyes. "What? You're going to be leaving us, Jesus? No! What about us? We'll be all alone. Please don't leave us alone."

But Jesus addresses those troubled and fearful hearts. He gives them two promises regarding what lay ahead for them after his crucifixion and resurrection. They would not be alone and on their own. They'd have company. The first promise he gave them, he said, "If anyone loves me, they will keep my word and my father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." If anyone loves Jesus, meaning if anyone follows Jesus believing in him, delighting in him. If you follow Jesus, you will

keep my word, Jesus said. Jesus is talking about trusting in Him for eternal life. That's keeping his word. And He's also talking about being obedient to his word, to the new commandment, for instance, that he gave them earlier, and to love one another as he's loved them. Or living out the great commandment to love God with heart, soul, strength, and mind and neighbor as yourself that's keeping Jesus' word. And as they do that, trusting and obeying Jesus promises that they will experience the father's love at work in their lives. And Jesus and the Father would come to them and make their home with them. As I think about Jesus and the Father making their home with us, it sounds so wonderful because home is a warm, intimate image of relationship, the place where their security and love, where you enjoy togetherness and a sense of belonging and comfortable familiarity with one another. And I love those two words he adds to it: home with us. You know, he's going to be with us as a Christian. That's my favorite preposition: "with." It means that is a follower of Jesus Christ, I am never alone. He is with me to the end. Like the Psalm says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me." What a comforting promise that is.

But Jesus doesn't stop with just that one promise. He gave them another promise. He said someone else would be coming to be with them and to help them out. He would teach and encourage them with everything Jesus has ever said. He'd bring to mind his promises, his love for us, his instructions for living life to the full as followers of Christ. That person, Jesus says, is the Holy Spirit. Listen again to His words. "The Father will also send the helper, the Holy Spirit, to bring to remembrance all that I have said to you." In other words, the whole Trinity will be moving in, it sounds like. No reason for loneliness anymore. His followers will never face anything alone. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will be with them. And that means peace. Jesus just describes the implications of these promises. He says, "Peace, I leave with you. Peace, I give to you. Not as a world gives, do I give to you." Jesus is saying "I've given you this glimpse into the future, these promises, in order that you may have my peace deep within you." So that is, you face the ups and downs of life, you'll know you're never alone. You're not abandoned. I'll always be with you. The father will be with you and the spirit will be with you in every circumstance. And that will bring peace to you. "So don't let your hearts be troubled," Jesus sums it up, "neither let them be afraid. As my followers, you're never going to be alone. I've got you covered. That's the piece I'm giving you," Jesus said to them in that upper room.

And we have to ask, did Jesus make good on all of these things that He promised? And the answer to that is, yes, he did. Remember, we're presently in the church season of Easter, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his appearing to his disciples again. He proved to them again and again that He would always be with them as Savior, Lord, and friend. As He kept popping up here and there, it got to the point, I imagine that they probably started looking for him as they turned every corner. You see, he was teaching them his presence. He was making good on the promise. And remember, we're soon going to be entering a new season of the church year called The Celebration of Pentecost, when we remember again that those same anxious disciples who were feeling like they were being abandoned were then filled with the Holy Spirit. And He led them and taught them and guided them and empowered them as a witness of the Gospel to the world. Everything happened just as Jesus promised: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit came to them and gave them divine peace that surpasses all understanding, and guarded their hearts and minds as they prayed and served and told the story to others about Christ crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. They had the peace of being absolutely sure, confident, that that nothing, neither death nor anything life threw at them could separate them from the love of God in Jesus Christ their Lord.

Now, you and I know they did not have a peaceful, quiet life. Jesus never promised that. They faced many hardships and tribulations, just as he said they would. But they also experienced over and over again the truth that as they went through those things, they were never alone and would never be abandoned by the one who loved them and gave his life for them at the cross to give them peace with God by paying for their sins and rising again to be with them forever. And his followers have been experiencing the peace of his loving, powerful presence ever since. He's still available. He lives. He lives. Christ Jesus lives today. He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way. A friend of mine going through cancer and chemotherapy in the past year remarked, "I don't know where I'd be if I didn't have Jesus to turn to as my friend. He's been so faithful." She was experiencing the divine presence, which gives peace – the peace that Jesus promised. No, she'll tell you, she can't see him. But she's learned along the way that he really is there as she leans upon him and trusts him. And that gives her a deep, deep peace.

That peace is available to everyone through faith in Jesus Christ. There are many who long for an inner peace that surpasses all understanding. But the problem is they're

turning everywhere but to Jesus. They believe they can have the peace without the Prince of Peace. And Christ alone is where you're going to find that peace that your heart is really longing for. You can actually have a personal relationship with the Prince of Peace by surrendering yourself to his leadership and care over you. He stands ready to give you peace with God through the forgiveness of your sins, as well as the peace of God in a new life with him that lasts forever. You will find him to be the most faithful friend you've ever had.

And perhaps you are already a believer in Christ and trusting in what He's done for you, for your salvation. You know that you're going to go to Heaven because you trust the promise. But you're still a bit mystified at this talk of having a personal relationship with Christ and experiencing the peace of God's presence in your life. Know this: you can have that. The resurrection affirms that promise that we've heard in this story for the day. We know that he's living. He's still available to personally know and call upon in your daily living. You can come to intimately know his friendship and experience his presence in peace as he and the father makes his home with you, and the spirit dwells in you.

You know, as I think about these promises, I'm reminded of a story that Christian author Dallas Willard, who lost his mom as a young child, told of a young boy whose mom had died. He was especially sad and lonely at night. And so, he would come into his father's room and ask if he could sleep with him. But even then, he couldn't rest until he knew that his father's face was turned towards him. "Father," he'd ask, "is your face turned toward me now?" "Yes," the father would say. "You're not alone. I'm with you. My face is turned toward you." When at last the boy was assured of this, he could finally rest. Dallas Willard concludes his story by saying "How lonely life is. Oh, we can get by in life with the God who doesn't speak. Many at least think they do so. But it's not much of a life, and it is certainly not the life God intends for us or the abundance of life Jesus came to make available."

My dear friend, if you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, be sure of this: his face is turned toward you. There's a hymn chorus that encourages us to respond by turning to him. "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace." It's a matter of turning – turning to the father in prayer. He will meet you there. As the song says, "Oh, what peace we often forfeit Oh, what needless pain we bear. All

because we do not carry everything to God in prayer." Turn to His Word and let the Spirit teach you, and bring to remembrance all that Jesus Christ has said to you about God's love for you and what He's done for you at the cross and what He has in mind for you and your life. In the written word, you will meet the living word. Turn to Christ's church, where he promises to be present in the Word, in the sacraments, and in fellow believers. For remember, he said, "Where two or three are gathered there, am I in the midst of them." Turn to the world in witness and service. Put yourself out there and commit yourself to tell the story about Jesus to others, and remember that He's promised this: "Lo, I am with you [as you do that] always," and give yourself over to compassionately serving others in its name. And he'll meet you there. Remember he said, "As you did it to the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me."

This promise is a truth that was affirmed at the resurrection. And he will meet you in these ways and give you his peace, which surpasses all understanding and guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. So, peace to you. Christ is risen. You're not alone. He's there for you. Turn to him and you will be able to say from the bottom of your heart, he is risen, indeed. Let's pray: Lord, thank you for the promise that trusting in Jesus will never be alone. Help us to trust that truth so that we may have your peace that surpasses all understanding. Amen.