



St. Andrew's Church

1502 Fourth Avenue
York, PA 17403

www.standrewsyork.org 717-843-3868

grant@standrewsyork.org



June 4, 2020

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

For over a week now, our Nation has witnessed a wide-range of responses to the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN, on May 25, 2020: peaceful protests, violent protests, senseless acts of rioting and vandalism; hatred, rage, fear, confusion. We have heard calls for calm, shouts for more violence, and many voices just trying to be make sense of it all. As a result, our Nation once again confronts the unresolved issues of racism, inequality, and injustice, among others. These events demand that we find ways to address these issues and seek a way forward so that we can truly work to establish “a more perfect Union” and once and for all begin to bring about positive systemic change.

As people of faith, as part of the Body of Christ known as St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in York, PA, I call us to a time of prayer, both individual and communal. I call us to a time of self-reflection and meditation on the Words of our faith. I call us to seek to transform our own lives so that we can be positive voices for the hope that is within us in the midst of so many negative voices, and, by the Grace of God, contribute to our communities and the National conversation positively grounded in our faith.

Over the next five weeks, I will issue five pastoral letters. These letters will focus on five key areas and approach them from a theological perspective. My hope is that by reflecting on these we will be able to contribute to the conversations that need to be held in our communities from a position of the love of God that calls us all into peace, justice, and God's unshakeable Grace. The five areas that I will explore in these letters are peace, justice, repentance, reconciliation and hope.

PEACE

Peace is elusive. A moment of peace can quickly degenerate into a moment of conflict. Throughout human history we have seen periods of peace give way to periods of war. We have seen unimaginable carnage yield to peace. We have seen the cycle of peace-to-war-to-peace time and time again. Leaders have proclaimed “Peace in our time” only to see within a few months

our time of peace shattered by war. This is the nature of worldly peace. Then, there is God's Peace.

God's Peace ~ what does that mean?

First, we need to note that God's Peace surpasses all understanding. While that may not seem helpful or encouraging, when we stop and think about it there is some comfort in that. Once we have told ourselves that we have totally figured out God is precisely the moment we make our gravest mistake. We can never fully understand God in this World - that full understanding will come, and it will come in the "world to come". God remains a mystery, and as such we are invited daily to enter more deeply into the mystery of God. By so doing, we glimpse the true nature of God along the way.

We believe that we have had the ultimate glimpse of the true nature of God in Jesus of Nazareth. In Christ Jesus, "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Colossian 2:9). Therefore, in the life of Jesus, lived out on Earth, we glimpse the true nature of God and Godly living.

What does Jesus tell us about God's Peace?

In John's account of the Gospel, Jesus has a lot to say about God's Peace: "Peace I leave with you; my own peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives" (John 14:27). I appreciate the way our Prayer Book paraphrases this verse in the Maundy Thursday liturgy: *Peace is my last gift to you, my own peace I now leave with you; peace which the world cannot give, I give to you* (BCP 275). There is a difference in the world's understanding of peace and the Peace of God.

What is the difference?

First, what do the biblical words that we translate as "Peace" suggest. Whether the word is *Shalom* (Hebrew) or *eiréné* (Greek), we find the notion of Peace in both the Old and the New Testaments and mentioned more than 320 times from Genesis to Revelation. God's Peace abounds. When we encounter Peace in the scriptures, we are hearing notions of wholeness, completeness, quietness, rest.

What does God's Peace look like?

Before we turn to God's Peace, let's first consider what that we learn of worldly peace in scripture. Jeremiah, one of the great Prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, notes that far too often the world proclaims "peace, peace" as a means of glossing over the core. It rather like the old understanding that if we say something enough, it must be true. Jeremiah writes: "They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace."

(Jeremiah 6:14). Worldly peace is incomplete peace. Worldly peace is proclaimed even when there is still work to be done. God's peace, on the other hand, is perfect, complete, whole-some.

How, then, do we begin to shift to seeking and embracing God's Peace?

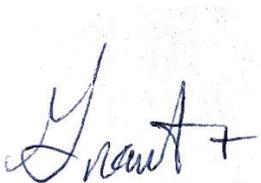
Again, we listen to the voice of the prophets. This time the voice of Isaiah. Isaiah longs for the coming of the Prince of Peace. Isaiah writes, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is name Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:2,6). God's Peace is the Peace that scatters all darkness; God's Peace is the Peace that shines as a beacon of a great light. God's Peace shines on, and in, and around God's people making us children of the light - though we may stand in a land of darkness. And we see this lived out in the "Prince of Peace"

We have come full circle. We stand once again with Christ Jesus as he promises to give his early disciples, and us, the Peace which the world cannot give.

The Peace that we receive from Christ is the promise that God is with us always even to the end of the Ages. The Peace that we receive from Christ is freedom to live as children of God. The Peace that we receive from Christ is the ability to enter into the broken worldly peace and strive bring about wholeness, completeness, perfection - God's Peace.

Seeking God's Peace in our current time is seeking to discover what wholeness among the races look likes (to focus on that issue primarily for the moment). God's Peace invites us to recognize that we are not complete as long as there is still division, hatred, and the inability to hear each other. God's Peace empowers us to wade into the division, hatred, the inability to hear each other and start to heal the divide, dampen the hatred, listen with open ears and aching hearts. When we start to do this, we start to glimpse God's Peace. When we do this, our view of justice begins to take a new shape. When we do this, mountains begin to flatten and plains begin to rise and the glory of the Lord is revealed, and we shall all see it together (Isaiah 40:5).

In the Peace of Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "T. Grant Ambrose". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

The Reverend T. Grant Ambrose
Rector