

“Peace I Leave with You”
Psalm 67, John 14:23-29
Rev. Joy Laughridge
May 25, 2025

Can you imagine being in a scenario in which you are flying high above the earth in an airplane and suddenly the pilot becomes incapacitated, and you realize that you are going to have to try to fly and land the plane? Do you think you would panic? I think I would panic, but then I guess I would try because what else are you doing to do? If you don't try you have no chance, and there's at least some chance that you could pull off a landing if you try. That's a situation that I don't ever want to be in, but there are real people who have found themselves in that exact situation. If you do a google search, you'll see several news reports and YouTube videos of stories like this. Our Gospel reading this morning doesn't say anything about planes or emergency landings, but that is the scenario that came to mind when I was thinking about the text this week because Jesus speaks a word of comfort and assurance to his disciples who would be left to carry on his ministry after his physical departure.

It's not a perfect analogy, but I think there is a comparison to be made when you think about how serious and important the mission was that was being handed off to them. Jesus came to seek all the lost sheep who have gone astray and save us from destruction. He came to dethrone the Prince of Darkness and establish his just and righteous rule on the earth. He came to make God, and God's love, and God's purposes visible, and when he had completed his earthly ministry, his disciples were to be entrusted with the message of what he had accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection. They would be sent to share and proclaim that good news that God's salvation has come through Christ and to witness with their lives and in their community to the reality of Jesus's rule and his kingdom. That's a weighty responsibility. It's a serious mission, and it was even scarier than just being entrusted with a serious and important mission because they would be sent to do it in a world and in an environment that would often be antagonistic toward and opposed to them and the message that they lived and proclaimed.

John often refers to “the world,” in his Gospel (78 times). Judas uses the word in verse 22 when he asks Jesus how he will reveal himself to the disciples but not the world. “The world” means different things at different times in John, but one thing it represents is the realm of darkness and the forces that oppose God. This is the idea in John 12:31 when Jesus says, “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.” Sometimes it also refers to those people and earthly powers that readily align themselves with the forces of darkness and evil and are resistant to God and God's truth. This is the idea that Jesus is getting at in John 3:19 when he says, “And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.” The tension or the battle between light and darkness, good and evil, God and the devil is a theme throughout the Gospel of John, and this is in the background as Jesus was talking with his disciples. So, if we go back to our flying the plane analogy this adds another layer to the scenario. Jesus's disciples are going to have to keep flying the plane, but the flying

conditions aren't necessarily going to be good making it even harder at times. I've probably told some of you about flying into the Miami airport a couple of years ago when I was going to meet our youth mission team in Cincinnati. It was July which is thunderstorm season and not a good time to be flying into Miami in my opinion! I have never experienced that level of turbulence, and I imagined that the plane was going to get split in half by a bolt of lightning at any second. I was pretty scared and I was just a *passenger*. If for some reason I had to step in to fly and land the plane and do it in those kinds of conditions that would be a next level of terrifying!

When Jesus was talking to the disciples in John 14, they were gathered for their last meal with Jesus on the night he would be arrested. Jesus goes on for chapters in John with instructions and words of comfort and assurance, but at that point the disciples didn't understand all that Jesus was talking about. In that moment, they didn't realize that Jesus was talking about his impending death and that he was preparing them for a future mission and ministry that they would carry on after his resurrection and ascension. There was uncertainty and anxiety in the air though. Jesus was comforting them, and he was explaining things to them in advance so that when the time came when they *did* realize they were going to have to "fly the plane" in some difficult conditions, they would remember and be comforted and strengthened by what he had promised.

Our situation is different from the disciples' in that we listen to what Jesus said on that night in the Upper Room, and we already know how the story was going to unfold. We also hear his words as disciples who have never had Jesus physically present with us. The future reality that Jesus was describing for the disciples in John is the only reality that we have ever known, but his words are important for us today because it's *our* reality that would soon *become* the disciples' reality that Jesus was preparing them for. They would be the first generation of disciples who would be commissioned to go and make new disciples. We are the present generation of disciples that have been sent to carry on this important work. We are the present generation that has been sent to announce good news and proclaim freedom to the captives in a world where the conditions still aren't always favorable for that kind of work; where sin, and darkness, and evil are still trying to defend their ground and hold on tight to the captives that Jesus is ready to set free. It *is* a serious calling; a significant mission, and when you think about it, it's pretty cool that Jesus didn't just give us some meaningless and inconsequential busy work to do while we wait for his return. Jesus is willing to give us *big* responsibility which is exciting, and it feels good to know that Jesus is willing to let *us* be his hands, and feet, and voice, and heart, he's willing to let us get in there and do stuff that matters, but if we take our calling seriously at all, and if we understand at all the importance of the work that Jesus has given us to do, chances are, we may feel a little scared about it sometimes. We aren't really sure that we can fly the plane. What if we can't figure out what to do? What if we crash? Why couldn't Jesus just stay around and do it himself instead of leaving such important work to flawed and fearful people like us?

I think it is good if we feel some nervousness about whether we can really proclaim the gospel in the ways Jesus leads us to do that, and make new disciples, and help build and

bear witness to Jesus and his kingdom. I think some nervousness is good because it's a sign that we do understand the weight and importance of the mission and ministry that has been entrusted to us, and I think it's good because the nervousness can be the thing that points us back to Jesus and reminds us that *he* gives us the strength and power and ability to do anything and everything that he asks us to do. Humility that drives us back to Jesus is good, but Jesus doesn't want us to be anxious, and troubled, or to become paralyzed by fear. John 14 opens with Jesus saying to his disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God believe also in me." He repeats this again in the verses we read this morning after promising to give his peace to the disciples. "Peace, I leave 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 let them be afraid." Can you imagine flying the plane, carrying on the mission that you may not feel equipped or strong enough to do, and sticking to it in the face of resistance or ridicule, yet feeling peace and assurance as you do it? Jesus was saying to his disciples, and he says to us, that this is possible.

The peace that Jesus refers to is not necessarily the absence of conflict which is the kind of peace we often so earnestly seek. Especially if you are a peacemaker, which I am. People like me are often driven to try to make everyone happy and eradicate all sources of conflict which seems like the way to achieve perfect peace, but it isn't always, and Jesus isn't talking about rescuing his disciples from the conflicts and challenges that they might encounter while following him. Here Jesus is stressing to the disciples that the peace he gives is a gift that comes through the love relationship that they have with him. Jesus is the trustworthy leader who loves us and always leads us to what is good and good for us. He leads us to wholeness, and this is what God's shalom, or peace, is. When things are put together correctly – whether that's our relationship with God, or our relationship with others, or whether it means our affections and intentions are ordered correctly. This peace that Jesus gives isn't shaken or affected by things going on around us, but it may be disturbed when we don't listen to and obey the voice of the one who loves us.

Maintaining a close relationship with Jesus- the kind in which we truly listen to his voice and truly obey the words that we hear him speaking- is crucial as we attempt to follow him and carry on his ministry. The disciples wouldn't have known how this would be possible once Jesus was physically removed from them, and they wouldn't fully understand it until the day of Pentecost, but on that night in the Upper Room, Jesus spoke to them about the Advocate, who is the Holy Spirit, who would come and be present with them when Jesus returned to the Father. Jesus promised that the Spirit would be present and would help the disciples. The Spirit would speak to them and remind them of everything Jesus had said. The Holy Spirit would instruct them making them able to do what Jesus was leaving them to do. He was leaving them, and leaving them with big responsibility to carry on, but he wasn't abandoning them or leaving them to do big and important things for him without help.

We can come back one more time to our airplane analogy here. We're imagining ourselves in that situation, but I said at the beginning there are lots of examples of this really happening, and in all of the situations that I read about, those amateur pilots didn't just get

lucky and land the plane successfully on their own. The amateur pilots that I read about were assisted by the voice on the radio coming from the Air Traffic Control tower. In the stories I read, the safe landings were a combination of two things. The person who had to take over remained calm, *and* they listened carefully and followed the instructions that came from the knowledgeable person whose voice guided them through the radio step by step to a safe landing. It's not a perfect analogy because Jesus's physical absence doesn't mean he is incapacitated, but for the purpose of illustration, this gives us a picture of how we are not alone. Jesus keeps us in his perfect peace. It's his love and our relationship with him that we can lean into in times when we feel uncertain or nervous about what to do. The assurance that he loves us, and wants the best for us, and is always working for our good even in circumstances that are hard or scary for us, produces that peace that then allows us to listen carefully to the Holy Spirit, our helper who is ready and present and knowledgeable; who speaks, and leads, and will guide us through every step as we attempt to do the work and carry out the mission that Jesus has given us to do.

God's word to us today is a reminder that when Jesus returned to the Father, he did leave us with very important work to do. Remember, Jesus, who is God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but took on the form of a servant. He left heaven to come and live a life of perfect love and submission to God – a life that we fail again and again to live which is why we need a Savior. He was crucified and died a death he did not deserve to die, so that we could be saved from the sin that leads to death. God raised him from the dead, and he reigns now over his kingdom that will not end. The kingdom of this earth will come to end, and Jesus has sent us to show and tell everyone what he has done before that time comes. He sends us to invite everyone to trust him, to leave the kingdom of darkness that is destined for destruction behind, and receive through faith the gift of everlasting life in his kingdom. We are on a mission from God. We are flying the plane until Jesus comes, but we don't do it alone or in our own strength. We don't have to be afraid of bad conditions, or worried about our qualifications, or unsure about what to do or say. Our helper is with us to help, and with the Spirit's help, we can do it. Amen.

