

June 14, 2020

On my list of “Things I Miss” ... one of the most prominent is The Peace. I miss the Passing of the Peace ... physically and symbolically ... in our services.

Now the Peace comes at that point in the service immediately following the Confession & Absolution. Where we have confessed to God those things which we know we have done wrong, and we pray for those things we have done wrong that we don't know about. We receive a blessing (a sign of God's forgiveness), and then we turn to one another and offer a hand or a hug or a kiss (well, we used to do that ... I suspect that when we do resume in person services and eventually the Eucharist, that act will definitely look different):

The Peace is a sign of our forgiveness of & reconciliation with each other.

Which isn't always easy to do ... but something we should make every effort to do.

First – a bit of history ..

ADONI-BEZEK was a Canaanite king , who had an interesting way of dealing with his enemies after he defeated them He would cut off their thumbs and big toes as punishment.

He even boasted that over 70 defeated and maimed kings had crawled under his banquet table, feeding off of the scraps that fell to the floor.

(and I guess the Israelites were SO impressed with this novel way of humiliating your enemies ... that when they finally defeated ADONI-BEZEK himself, they chopped off his thumbs and big toes).

The History of our world is filled with bloody stories like these.

ZEDEKIAH , the last King of Judah, rebelled against Babylonia (the area we know now as Iraq). After an 18 month war, the Babylonian army broke through the walls of Jerusalem and captured King Zedekiah. Then they forced him to watch as they killed his family ... and then plucked out his eyes and locked him in jail for life.

We would like to think that such violent acts as these belong to the Barbaric Days of the past ... but we all know better.

Many of us are currently watching in horror as story after story floods our television and internet feed. Murders, violence, many race related.

We hear from agencies like Amnesty International -- that torture and maiming are still standard practice in many countries today.

Even we in the “civilized west” have developed our own type of torture. We have learned to deal with those we perceive to be our enemies by sniping at them with cruel words, or by giving a blistering stare, or threatening to respond in a certain way. All of these tactics do as much (if not more) damage than physical punishment itself.

The truth is, that when it comes to dealing with those with whom we do not agree ... we all have a little bit of ADONI-BEZEK in us. (whether they are a foreign nation , or the neighbours who don't keep their yard tidy , or the person who thinks differently about one issue or another).

For many – “Loving Your Enemy” is an idea that never really caught on -- it just doesn't make any sense. But no one bothered to fill God in on that. God doesn't know that enemies are for crushing, and humiliating, and destroying and abusing.

And I suppose that is a good thing for us ...

Because in our Second Reading today we heard Paul explain that WE were Gods enemies - and he still treated us well. In fact he INSISTED on treating us as friends.

We were ...

- the ungodly

- the sinners
- we were God's enemies

We had rejected God's love and rebelled against his authority. He had every right to declare war on us. But although we were his enemies, he refused to treat us that way. And while we were weak and godless and rebellious and sinful ... Jesus died for us..

Now it is possible to understand how we would die for someone who was good, or who we liked, or who was close to us, ... But God revealed just how deep his love for us is, by sending his own SON to die for us even tho we were neither good NOR loving. God did this for the sake of his “enemy”.

While we were still at war against his message (his love), God declared PEACE. And in doing so - God ran the risk that we would continue to fight, continue to be against him.

Which isn't all that unusual ... because in most wars, fighting DOES continue after the war has ended. The US Civil War, the Two World Wars, Korea they all record a certain amount of fighting happening after one side had surrendered to the other.

But THIS is no simple truce that God has declared ... this is not your average Cease-fire.

God is offering a full reconciliation. It is one thing to say "the fight is over" ... it is a much greater thing to say "now we are friends". And this is what God has done. He has befriended us.

And he does this with the full knowledge that we may go on living as if we were STILL God's enemies.

IT IS A RISK - But it is a risk God is willing to take.

- God's love overwhelms our selfish nature
- God turns the other cheek to our rebellious ways (even while our fists are still clenched)
- God extends to us the hand of friendship, and keeps that hand extended even when we get out the hammer and nails.

THIS RECONCILIATION (this friendship) is a GIFT ... plain and simple

Its not something we can earn ... its certainly not something we deserve ... and there is no possible way can make it happen on our own.

Its an unconditional, all-you-ever-need, no-strings-attached, gift.

But Paul says there is a SECOND gift – one which we have not yet fully received.

Which is this If we have reconciled to God by the death of his Son , even more so we are SAVED by his life"

AND BY LIFE -- PAUL MEANS THE SPIRIT THAT LIVES AMONG US.

When the U.S. Civil War ended, the south was in ashes and economic ruin. Reconstruction was slow and painful because of those people who continued to punish the defeated enemy, and take advantage of them. (and some will argue that the South never really recovered from that, and explains much of what is happening south of our border at the moment).

You and I can be thankful that our God is far more compassionate with us. Just imagine how much more he will restore us, and heal our wounds, and make us whole.

Because THAT is how God deals with those against him. He doesn't hurt them (he tries to heal them), He doesn't kill them, he sends his Son to DIE FOR THEM.

It is hard to believe, and even harder for us to duplicate. Its much easier to lash out and get a final shot in ... even after our enemy is down.

But the truth is – that God loves us enough NOT to attack us ... and if he can love US, then it is important that we show that same love for one another.

That is the message given during the peace ... It is us declaring that "the war is over , God has declared peace , let us come together, forgive and give thanks."

We remember that when we exchange the PEACE.

It is Risky I know ... and it doesn't always work ... and maybe one of these days God will "Wise Up" and realize that enemies are for crushing and not for loving and forgiving.

BUT I DOUBT IT ... because I KNOW that God is waiting for US to "Wise Up", and realize that the war is over.