

Easter 6 C 2022

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

May 22, 2022

John 14:23-29

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

In the gospel according to Matthew, there's something that we call the Sermon on the Mount. It's three consecutive chapters of the teachings of Jesus. Teachings about the meaning of life and how we ought to live our lives as his followers. It's very accessible and it's very profound. The Sermon on the Mount. Matthew chapters five, six, and seven.

A similar thing happens in John's gospel. Only instead of teaching on a mountain, Jesus teaches at the Last Supper. And whereas the Sermon on the Mount was three chapters, the Last Supper according to John is five chapters. And because it immediately precedes the arrest and passion of Jesus, these five chapters of John are sometimes called the Farewell Discourse. As with the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, these five chapters in John are about the meaning of life and how we ought to live our lives as followers of Jesus. And these two sets of teachings could not be more different. The Sermon on the Mount is much more earthy, much more secular, and much more in the style of a rabbi. The Farewell Discourse is much more spiritual and much more churchy. For example, in today's gospel reading (which is taken from the Farewell Discourse), Jesus says that "*the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything.*" That's very churchy. It involves the relationships among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What we call the Trinity. In today's gospel, Jesus also says, "*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.*" That's very spiritual. Sort of mysterious. The Father and the Son will make their home with us.

So the gospels give us these two compendiums of the teachings of Jesus. Two very different compendiums. Three chapters in Matthew. Five chapters in John. And nothing equivalent in Mark or Luke. That's useful to know. It's as though Jesus has given us two catechisms.

The Sermon on the Mount ends with a parable. A parable of two homes. One was built on sand. And one was built on rock. That parable is a suitable ending for the Sermon on the Mount, because it says that if you heed the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, then your house has been built upon rock. But if you ignore the Sermon on the Mount, then your house has been built upon sand. Jesus is quite graphic about the house built upon the sand. *The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!* I have spent much of my life on the Gulf Coast, where I was born and raised. And the Atlantic hurricane season begins ten days from now. So maybe that's why Jesus' words resound with me:

The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!

In today's gospel— from the other catechism of Jesus— we read these words: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.* I think the important thing about this teaching is the contrast that Jesus poses. There is *his* peace. But his peace is not the world's peace. "I do not give to you as the world gives." I think this statement, from the catechism of John's gospel, is analogous to the parable of the two houses, from the catechism of Matthew's gospel. Jesus is sort of laying out two ways of life. And on the surface, they look similar. But underneath, the foundations are quite different. There are two attractive homes. But one is built on rock. The other is built on sand. There are two ways to live your life in peace. But one of them is the world's peace. And the other is God's peace. They look the same on a superficial level. But they are profoundly different. Jesus is not the first teacher to describe two kinds of peace. Jeremiah— whose book is the longest in the Bible— Jeremiah talks about false peace and true peace. Having peace with the world. Versus having peace with God. So Jesus is not the first teacher to make this distinction.

However, in this five chapter catechism from John's gospel, Jesus asserts that his peace comes from the presence of God within us. *"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."* In this catechism, Jesus repeatedly states his connections with the Father and with the Spirit. The Trinity. So sometimes it seems that Jesus means that he will be with us. But sometimes he seems to mean the Father. And sometimes he seems to mean the Spirit. I would settle for any one of those three. But it seems that when you get one, you get them all. Yet the important thing is that this is internal. It's personal. It's invisible. It's a relationship with God, a connection to God, that is on the inside. It's like the house built on the rock. You see the house, but you don't see the rock. But the rock is what keeps the house sound and safe.

A few years ago, there was an advertising campaign for drinking dairy milk. It said, "Got milk?" I don't think that the Christian life is as simple as, "Got Jesus?" When Jesus tells the parables of the two homes, he is talking about building. The project of leading our lives. We build upon a rock, or we build upon sand. In the gospel of John, Jesus talks about vines and branches and fruit. These are long term projects. Building a solid house. Cultivating a vineyard. These are the images that Jesus provides for the Christian life. It doesn't happen instantaneously. It's not simple. That's why it takes so many chapters to even lay out a simple catechism. But the benefit of Christian living is ultimately peace. And not just a peace that means the absence of war. But a kind of joy and hope that endures. *The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.* Our peace is because our home is made with God. Amen.