

We live in a world which is torn apart by conflict, and we don't even have to try very hard to see how that's true. Just take it in its most basic sense, talking about war. Did you know that the United States has been in one war or another almost every year since it was founded? Just think of the last 80 years, and how many wars we have been engaged in: World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, the war in Afghanistan after 9/11, which I would point out if you didn't know is actually still going on, and war with Iraq the second time. To say nothing of the threat of war with nations like Iran, North Korea, and who knows, maybe China. It seems like war is the norm rather than the exception. So is it any wonder then that we are looking for some kind of peace in the midst of all of this conflict? We don't even have to talk about war to see conflict either. Just think of this weekend, the riots which are going on in most American cities. In fact, if you didn't know, it's even happening in Fargo. Gov. Burgum yesterday signed an executive order authorizing the National Guard to bring order back to Cass County. Things seem to be a lot closer than we might think. And so we might be wondering how can we find order and peace in the midst of chaos? Now I don't know what the truth is. I don't know if we can know the whole truth, nor do I think the media is telling us the whole truth. That doesn't change the fact that there are people who have lost their possessions and lost their businesses, because of these riots. Or just think in terms of politics. We live in a nation which is deeply divided politically. If you want the proof of that, just on the Internet. Go to any news article you can find and go down to the comments section. You will find there people who are saying all kinds of nasty, vile things about people they disagree with, people they've never met. We live in a nation which unfortunately is deeply, deeply divided. But it doesn't just have to be on the public level either. There are many homes which unfortunately are also deeply divided, marriages and families which are torn apart by things like drugs, pornography, or any number of sins. It seems that conflict is the truth rather than the exception from top to bottom in our society. And so is it any wonder then that we try to find peace in the midst of all of this? The world has a hard time bringing that peace.

But Jesus in our reading for today speaks a timely, important word. He says this, verse 27, "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." Jesus brings us a peace unlike anything this world can offer, a peace without end, a peace beyond understanding, a peace which can live even in the midst of conflict, because it is the peace which comes from God.

Now, the world tries to provide peace, too. That's what Jesus means when he says, "Not as the world gives do I give to you." But what kind of peace does the world seek? What kind of peace does the world offer? And does it, unfortunately, sometimes catch us too? Because maybe we see all of this war and this conflict which is going on, and we come to the conclusion, "Well, things would just be better if we all just got along. Let's just all agree to disagree. Let's just think nice thoughts about one another, and as long as we are just trying to be nice, that'll be good enough. We can just keep our separate ways and let bygones be bygones." But does that work in our world today? These good thoughts or whatever we might want to call it. Does that actually bring about a lasting peace? Because the world unfortunately still has to take care of its own, for good reasons. We should look after our own. And that unfortunately means that we're to be caught up in conflict no matter what. All the good thoughts of the world are not going to change the fact that there will be wars and rumors of wars, just as Jesus promises that there will be. Yes, we can try to get along, but the reality is is that this world is broken. We will not get along until the world ends. So that doesn't give us much comfort, does it?

And we say, okay, fine! Maybe good thoughts are not enough to bring about peace. But what about force? Let's enact some laws. Let's have a bigger military. Let's have a bigger police force, a better equipped police force. That will somehow bring us peace, right? They could put it down right at the root, and we wouldn't have these problems. But laws can be twisted, can't they? Twisted to ends that

they were never intended to serve. And great armies might be a benefit for a country, but they're also a great temptation to use for making war. History has shown that time and time again. And I think we just need look at Minneapolis and other cities to see that the best equipped police forces in the world sometimes aren't enough to stop certain things from happening. The strength of men seems impressive, but it ultimately comes to nothing. The prince of this world will come to nothing. He will return to the dust, and all his plans will crumble away.

Okay, fine. We'll say, sure. Maybe force isn't going to solve the issue either. But let's just ignore it! Let's just go on our own merry ways. Let's just go do our own thing and leave the rest of the world to its craziness, because it doesn't affect me anyway. So as long as I just lose myself in some kind of distraction, lose myself in my own little world, that will bring me peace, right? That's why I go on and find comfort in things like entertainment and TV shows and Netflix binging and all of those kinds of things. We'll find peace that way, because hey, at least I'll be happy for a while. Does that work either? Because when we are done watching however many shows we just got done watching, do we actually feel peace, comfort? Or is it the fact that entertainment so quickly fades? Because how irritable do we feel sometimes when we can't partake of our TV shows, if we can't go on the Internet? Just see how grumpy people get when the Wi-Fi goes out. That'll show you what it's like for people who are looking for some kind of distraction. No, we're not going to find peace that way either. That's not the way to find a lasting comfort.

Okay, fine. Maybe we can't find peace in distraction. But how many people turn to substances, alcohol, or drugs, to find peace? Because how good they made them feel once upon a time! And if you weren't aware, this country is being torn apart by an opioid crisis, especially rural communities. People who are seeking that high through prescription drugs and abusing them, or through meth or whatever the case might be. If we don't think that it's here, we are sadly, sadly mistaken. But when people go and try to find peace and comfort through those things, the great irony and the great tragedy of it is that the very things that promised peace to them are the same things that take it away, as they wreck their health through those drugs and through those substances, whatever the case might be. Destroying their families, destroying their very lives, all in the name of seeking that peace.

The world promises peace, yes, Christians, but the world cannot deliver that peace. Because ultimately it comes to nothing. But Jesus Christ offers a real peace to you this day. Jesus Christ brings you a peace beyond all understanding, something that this world cannot comprehend, but which is yours because you are in him.

To a world torn apart by war, Jesus Christ is the King of Kings, the one who will break the bow and shatter the spear and burn the chariots with fire. He will bring peace to the nations, because he is the Prince of peace. And all people will bow to him in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and call him Lord at the end of days, because he is the King of all things.

And to a world torn apart by rioting and destruction and looting, Jesus Christ is our dearest treasure. Because even if we lose everything through destruction and through looting, Jesus remains more precious than many pearls, than many treasures, because he is the one thing needful above all things.

And to a world which is divided politically, Jesus will also bring peace. Because when we are in him, in Jesus Christ, we will love one another. And Jesus as the Lord of Lords will bring peace even to our fractured society, because he is the one who changes hearts and changes us so that we truly love one another.

And to a world which is seeking solace and comfort in distractions, Jesus becomes our highest joy, the one who is always there for us. The one who no matter what happens and no matter what we might suffer in this life, he remains, because he is truly the eternal Christ.

And to the world which is caught up in addiction and substance abuse, Jesus is the way out of addiction. Jesus is the way to change lives, so that even if we are caught in substance abuse or whatever is tearing our homes apart, Jesus will give us the way out, so that we will find true, lasting peace in him.

Yes, dear Christians, Jesus is our peace from beginning to end, and even when the world seeks in vain to find that peace, we have it in Jesus Christ. And we know that we have it, especially because of what Jesus says to us today. Verse 23: "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." When we are in the Word of God, we become the living temples of God. God is here within us. Not far away somewhere out there, but here. And because he is here, because he is right with us, we need not be afraid. We know seeing the fruits in our lives, the way that our lives have changed, that God is going to take care of us and give us that peace which passes all understanding.

We also have that promise in the Holy Spirit himself. The Holy Spirit who has been given to us as the Helper, so that even when we don't know how to pray, the Holy Spirit prays within us, bringing us up to the Father and keeping us close to him so that we don't have to worry or be afraid that we're going to lose God, because God is with us and has given us his Spirit to show us just that.

Yes, dear Christians, we have these proofs, proof that God is our peace, proof that God will not forsake us, proof that he is with us always. And if God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not leave us alone will never leave us alone, because he gives us that peace in his Son and in his Holy Spirit which you have today.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.