

During World War II, many members of the Lutheran church in Germany lost their faith because Hitler seduced them into ways of living that kept them from practicing their faith. But there was one man whom Hitler could not compromise. His name was Martin Niemöller. During World War I, Niemöller had been a great hero in the German Navy but with the rise of Nazism, he refused to bow to the authorities. He was marching to a different drumbeat. And march he did. When Hitler could not make him change his tune, could not bring him in line with the Nazis' brutal policies, Hitler had Niemöller the war hero thrown into concentration camps from 1937-1945.

Seven years later, when Niemöller came out of Dachau concentration camp, this is what he said: "First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me."

He further went on to say less well known but just as profound: "Christianity is not an ethic, nor is it a system of dogmatics, but a living thing." Everyone who saw the fruits of his example and words knew who he was and where he stood and how he built his reputation.

Niemöller was a disciple of Jesus and carried his peace. Like those who share the final meal with their Lord, in the setting of our "Farewell Discourse" Gospel, Niemöller experienced the "troubling" of the world that Jesus foretold. But he also knew the empowering of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit of God, who brings peace, remembrance and courage and hope.

Sometimes it seems fashionable in easy going Australia to downplay our faith, to show ourselves in tune with our world, to treat Christianity flippantly. "Don't become a fanatic," we say. "Don't go overboard with religion. I believe in my heart; just don't ask me to make a big deal of it."

But our faith is a big deal — or its no deal at all. Our relationship with God is everything or nothing. According to Jesus, we either develop the habit of deep faith or we get stuck in the habits of the world. This is what Jesus' disciples needed to know on the eve of his departure.

Jesus prophesied that they and we would have these times of loneliness in the world. That does not mean that either Jesus or the Father is unknowing or uncaring. It simply means that life is tough. What keeps us going in the right direction, has got to be the call of eternity that assures us of a resolution which transcends all of the trials and triviality we have to deal with now. This is the teaching of the Holy Spirit. It is the presence of peace that grows in the soil of adversity.

Remembering Jesus. That is what we are doing in these brief moments together, during the season of Easter: we are remembering Jesus. We are remembering God's love for us. We are remembering what it means to be what we were meant to be.

When the Danish novelist George Brandes was a young man, he looked up to Henrik Ibsen. Ibsen was much older than Brandes, but he took notice of the young writer. Once Brandes asked the famous dramatist for help and encouragement. Ibsen wrote a long letter in response, sharing this advice: "If you want to serve your world, you have to look inside first. You have to find out what you're made of. You have to mine the depths of your own heart. Then you have to be true to

yourself, letting your faith shine for others.” Said Ibsen, “There is no way in which you can benefit society more than by coining the metal you have in yourself.”

He was right. No Christian can bring anything of true value to his world by putting on airs, by denying the grace of God within, or by keeping the power of the Spirit locked up.

Here’s the big question this Gospel passage asks of us: How is the peace Jesus gives different from peace the world gives? And why does it matter?

The biblical idea of peace is grounded in the Hebrew word, ‘shalom.’ Shalom is more than an absence of strife or conflict. In fact, one of the indicators for Christ’s shalom, is the way it sustains us in the middle of conflict and strife.

Shalom indicates completion, wholeness, a time in the future when everything is made right and put into God’s intended balance for Creation. Christ’s peace brings this hope for wholeness into the present. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Christ’s peace is not just some future hope, it’s something we can experience now. So while the peace that Jesus gives is eternal, in contrast to the temporary nature of any peace we might find in the world, we don’t have to wait for Christ’s peace to become real to us. Eternity begins this moment.

But it is so easy to get stuck in an endless cycle of looking for peace in all the wrong places, constantly striving for the kind of peace the world gives us. We think if people would just stop arguing and start listening to one another, there could be peace. If we could just be satisfied with what we have instead of trying to consume more and more, we would find peace.

Maybe if governments would just do their jobs, and people would stop taking advantage of others’ weaknesses, if the rich would stop building their fortunes on the backs of the poor and people would take responsibility for the harm they cause – maybe then there could be some hope of peace in the world. Maybe then our hearts could stop being troubled, and we could stop being afraid. Maybe then we could stop worrying, our collective blood pressure would get under control. Maybe then there could be peace.

But the peace the world offers isn’t really any peace at all. At best, it’s a bandage we put over the wounds of our fear and frustration. It won’t last. It is only a temporary fix.

“Stop being afraid. Let your hearts be free from worry,” Jesus says. “I give you my peace. And it is nothing at all like the world’s peace. You don’t have to earn it or build it or create it out of your own meagre resources. I give it to you. Just receive it.”

As his disciples were wondering what would happen next, Jesus gave his peace to them. Even before he would be arrested and tortured and killed, Jesus knew that his work was already accomplished. He was already living beyond resurrection, and his words were already preparing the disciples for the moment when they would see him rise into the clouds and return to the Father’s side. Beyond incarnation, beyond crucifixion, beyond even resurrection, Christ’s ultimate purpose is revealed in his ascension into glory. And the ultimate purpose of John’s gospel comes into focus.

Jesus says, “And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.” This is the purpose of John’s entire gospel: “These things are written that you may believe,

and believing, have life in his name.” (Jn 20:30-31)

John’s whole gospel is about the incarnation – God becoming flesh. God came among us to fulfil God’s deepest desire to live with us, to make a home with us. The goal has always been to include us in God’s interrelationship of Father, Son, and Spirit. There is more beyond incarnation, even beyond resurrection. Ascension brings us to a plane of existence where we are in Christ just as Christ is in the Father.

This is the peace that Jesus offers. It has nothing to do with earthly armistice agreements or treaty negotiations or conflict resolution protocols. Christ’s peace is both an inner peace we know in our hearts, and an outer peace we experience when we love one another. But more than that, it is the peace Christ gives us when we believe in him and we receive life in his name.

So how is Jesus living in us here? What do others know of the power of the Holy Spirit who shines through us into a troubled world? There is a glowing network spreading from this place, isn’t there? How is your connection?

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