

A Greater Peace:

St. John chapter 15 verses 9-17

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In January 1941 President Franklin D Roosevelt gave a speech to the American Congress, sharing his vision for the world after World War II. He envisaged four basic freedoms to be enjoyed by all people everywhere: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear.

Far be it from me to add to Franklin D Roosevelt, but there is a fifth freedom omitted from his speech I would want to add, that holds the key to true freedom and liberty. We desperately need freedom of speech, worship, from want and fear - but we also need to be set free from ourselves, from the tyranny of our selfish sinful natures which controls us from within.

The French philosopher, Albert Camus, wrote, “We used to wonder where war lived, what made it so vile. And now we realise that we know where it lives, that it lives within ourselves.” The violence and hatred and pain all around us comes from within ourselves. We need to be set free, from the power and tyranny of sin in our lives. Responding to an article in the London Times, GK Chesterton expressed it like this: “Dear Sir: Regarding your article ‘What’s Wrong with the World? I am. Yours sincerely’

Paul wrote of a battle raging within him in Romans c.7. He wanted to do the right things but found a natural inclination towards doing the wrong things. He says, “*I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing.*” (Romans 7v18-19) He saw another power at work within him, waging war in his heart and mind, making him a prisoner of its demands. War and violence is the natural consequence of what we are on the inside!

Today, just as in Paul’s day, the legalists think they have the answer in laws and rules and regulations and threats. But Paul explained that no amount of legislation can change a person on the inside, a person’s basic sinful nature. It is not law on the outside, but law on the inside that makes the difference. Another power is needed within us to set us free from our sinful nature, and that power only comes by submitting our lives to Christ, when the Holy Spirit of God comes and dwells within us, making our life his home. Paul discovered that power for himself when he committed himself to Christ; the power to put aside his sinful nature and live in the power of the Spirit.

And the fruit of that new life will then not be seen in our sinful nature, the violence and the war, the selfish ambition and jealousy and fits of rage. It will be seen in the fruit of God’s Spirit at work: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Imagine how different the world would be, how transformed, if people displayed those qualities, if you and I displayed those qualities. We need another power within, and that power only comes from the Holy Spirit of God, who will, if we allow him, produce the right sort of fruit from our lives.

Today is a day of remembrance. We do all sorts of things to try and remember. We write lists and post-it notes on the fridge door; we set alarms and make diaries entries; all so that we do not forget, so that we remember the things that we are supposed to do, the important things, people and occasions. Today we remember: we remember the horrors of war. We remember those who gave their lives to secure our freedom from oppression and tyranny. And we remember to pray for peace in our world.

But I would suggest that we also remember someone far greater, someone who, if allowed, will bring an infinitely greater and more lasting peace and freedom to us, who

gave up his life so that we might have life. Our Gospel reading is often associated with war memorials and Remembrance Sunday, from John's Gospel, c.15v12: *"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."* I have no objection to it being used on such a day as today for such love is a noble thing. But in the Bible it is spoken by Christ himself about his own sacrifice, the laying down of **his** life that we might be reconciled with God, set free from the power of sin in our lives. And Christ's sacrifice is superior in every way. Listen to Paul writing in Romans 5 (v6-8): *"You see,"* he says, *"at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* We join in worship this morning to Jesus Christ, who died... that we might live, who rose again from the grave... that we might rise to new life with him, who sends the Holy Spirit... that we might be set free from our past, free from ourselves, free from the sinful nature that holds us back, from which comes so much wrong and evil and violence.

Today is Remembrance Sunday. For Christians every Sunday is a Remembrance Sunday, as we gather around the Lord's Table and take bread and wine; "Do this in remembrance" we are commanded. We remember Christ in his death and resurrection; he died for us - sinners - that we might know the freedom from tyranny within, that we might have peace with God... permanent, lasting and eternal; and knowing peace with God, we might know the freedom to live in peace with one another.

We remember - and it is important that we never forget - the evils of which mankind is capable, which come from within. But we also come remembering Jesus Christ our Lord who died that we might be set free.

Edward Henry Bickersteth's hymn captures it perfectly: "Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin? The blood of Jesus whispers peace within."