

“The Pearls of Life: Serenity”
John 14:25-27

Today we continue the sermon series about the Pearls of Life as reminders of some of the most important and basic lessons of faith. We are focusing on serenity and what it means to live in a state of internal peace no matter what the circumstances of life might be. This does not mean that we would be oblivious to the challenges and struggles of our lives. Serenity is about being aligned with and in touch with our souls that even when we go through the storms of life we don't lose our center. One of the things that often throws us off balance is the feeling that we are alone and separate from God and from others. And so today we reflect on Jesus' message to the disciples as he was about to leave them. The verses for today from John 14:25-27 were part of his reminder to the disciples that they were not going to be left alone after his death and resurrection. This reminds me of the movie “Home Alone” when the eight-year-old boy Kevin accidentally gets left behind by his family when they go on vacation to France. Kevin, who was a troublemaker, was happy at first to have the house to himself, but then he had to contend with two burglars who were trying to break into his house. Kevin booby traps the whole house and ends up beating two grown men at their own game. Here is a clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpfOhYRYv80>

We sometimes feel like Kevin that we are on our own, left to fend for ourselves and mischief is our only way out of trouble. This logic reduces us to see the world as a dangerous place and that one has to only focus on survival. The big problem with this way of thinking is that it robs us of our sense of peace. If we are always fighting for our survival and feeling threatened by the world, then how could we ever let our guard down and trust?

Our scripture for today gives a clear message about what helps us find true and lasting peace. This is part of Jesus' farewell speech to his disciples. He was about to leave them and they were asking him all kinds of questions that showed their deep level of anxiety. First, Thomas asks (verse 5), “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Then Philip asks (verse 8) “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Even Judas shared his anxiety by asking (verse 22) “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?” Jesus knew that the disciples were struggling with his leaving. They could not imagine the future without him in their midst. How would they face opposition and continue to be faithful to the mission and vision of Jesus when he was going to leave them behind? The same anxiety was true of the community to which the Gospel of John was written. Remember that the Gospel was written around the year 100 CE which meant that the followers of Jesus were experiencing anxiety about their identity as Jews after the Roman Empire destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE. There was great persecution of the Jews and fear among them which led to some serious divisions. So all of this is to say that when we read the words of Jesus about peace, we cannot think of that peace and serenity apart from the anxiety of our lives and of our world. This anxiety is deeply

rooted in our sense of being separate from God and from others and in our sense that our survival is at stake.

I love how Jesus never responds directly to the questions asked of him. What he does instead is address the underlying issues behind the questions. Jesus does not engage Judas' question by saying, "Well, I can't really reveal that I am the Messiah because not everyone is ready for this message and you still have some work to do as human beings before really getting what I am talking about." Instead, Jesus reminds the disciples that they were not alone. Even though he was going to leave them, the Spirit of God, the Advocate, was going to be with them. Their connection to the Spirit was never going to be broken and that is the true source of their peace. Being rooted and grounded in God's presence in their lives was the only answer to all of their questions and to their deep anxieties! It is that simple and it is that hard!

It is a simple and a basic lesson of faith and yet it is very difficult to practice each and every day. The illusion of being separate and on our own is so powerful and it wreaks havoc on our sense of peace. But with the right guidance, love, and prayer practices, we can reclaim our sense of serenity. That is why I hope that you will focus this week on the Serenity Pearl and its meaning of peace that comes from God. The authors of *The Pearls of Life* book write the following about this Pearl, "The heavenly blue pearl is a rest stop. Here in peace and quiet, we are allowed to 'be' without any need to 'do.' On the other side of the desert, the Serenity Pearl offers us a place to stretch out and unwind...The blue pearl encourages us to ask, 'What baggage can I get rid of?' In this serene moment nothing is holding us down. We can fly freely like the birds. This is a God-ordained moment of peace and quiet...This pearl addresses our yearnings for harmony, balance, and connection. We need to stop and take comfort in our Serenity Pearl more often. Although it can seem a distraction to pause for a Serenity Pearl moment during difficult times, this is exactly when we need it." I would say that those moments of serenity remind us that we are not alone and that the peace which Jesus gives can never be taken away from us. The time when the words were spoken by Jesus about peace was very turbulent. Yet, Jesus took the time to just be with his disciples and to focus on that connection.

In their book *The Leadership Triangle*, Kevin Ford and Ken Tucker tell the story of George who discovered his potential in life despite the great odds that were against him because of the deep sense of serenity and connection he found in his life. "George brings a special kind of energy with him. He loves to play, to have fun and to discover new things. Nowhere is his appetite for discovery more evident than in his love for a diverse range of music from classical to rock. A natural at the guitar and the bass, George is now teaching himself drums. It's like a switch turns on in his brain when he touches an instrument. He instinctively knows how to reproduce the sound playing in his head on the instrument in his hand. Yet it was when George picked up the cello that the magic happened and George's influence and impact began to expand. George's mother, Sharon, brought a new cello to their home for George to play. As his father Mike watched in wonder, George, not yet eight years old, listened to the soundtrack from *The Lord of the Rings* and immediately began picking out the haunting Celtic

theme music on the cello. He then continued to do it with each new piece of music he heard. From the point at which he received that cello, he could not be stopped...George has this yearning, a demanding appetite for musical expression. In this way, perhaps he is like other teens –talented teens -who discover their special ability and become consumed with a need to perfect it. The difference between George and many of those other teens is a simple one: George was born without arms. (Screen: images of George)

George was not expected to live. Born without arms, he was abandoned to the horrors of a Romanian orphanage while only an infant - abandoned to a notoriously inhumane system by parents who did not believe they could care of him. Or who – more importantly - did not see how their little baby could make it in the world. Then the Dennehy family of Connecticut entered the picture. Devoted to helping differently-abled and special-needs children, Sharon and her husband Mike had three biological children of their own but looked to add to their family. They found little George in that orphanage, underweight for his age, under a sign that warned potential parents that he might live to adulthood. 'Unable to Thrive,' the sign said, while the medical chart that hung on his institutional crib warned that he might not last another six months. A daunting prospect for any parent. Still, the Dennehy's took this tiny baby home, making him part of a household of love that would grow to include eight other adopted children. And in doing so they provided an environment where George would discover, optimize and unleash his Intentional Difference (special potential)." All of this happened because of deep love and connection.

May we be blessed today and each day to take time to stay awake and aware of God's love and peace in our hearts. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."
Amen.