

PATRIOTS WASHING FEET, THE WISDOM OF BILLY GRAHAM,
AND THE PRINCIPLE OF THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

William Blake was a famous English poet and Christian mystic. Blake not only wrote some great poetry, but he also drew some fascinating pictures to go along with his poetry. In one particular illustration, Blake portrays a man with large hands standing at the foot of a ladder. The ladder reaches way up into the clouds and reaches the moon. The man stands there looking up and saying, "I want. I want." That is all he says. He wants. He wants very deeply, but he does not know what it is he wants.

I find this to be an appropriate picture of life today. Most of us have a gnawing hunger deep down within us. Somewhere within most of us, there is a voice crying out, "I want. I want." But we are not really sure what it is we want. Sometimes we think it is more of the material things of life that we want. And then we get the new car, the new house, the new clothes, but the hunger is still there. Sometimes our hunger is for a new job, a new town, a new spouse, but even after the change that voice is still there crying out, "I want." We find ourselves restless, unhappy and unfilled. Like that man in the painting, we desperately want something, but we are not quite sure what it is that we want.

What is it that we really want? What is it that we really need? I think what we want and what we need more than anything else is inner peace. That gnawing hunger is for peace within ourselves. We want an inner peace so when we look in the mirror, we feel good about who we are. We want an inner peace that can carry us through the troubles and conflicts of life. I need that inner peace. I want it. You need that inner peace. You want it.

I have good news for you this morning. We can have that inner peace. We can have that hunger within us satisfied. Jesus promised that we could have that deepest want fulfilled. He promised that we could live with an inner peace and harmony, a satisfaction, a sense of fulfillment. In the scripture lesson for this morning Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you." What a marvelous promise! We can have the kind of peace that Jesus had in His life.

Jesus, in promising his peace, is not promising us a life that is free from conflict or trouble or suffering. Jesus had inner peace in the midst of a life full of conflict and trouble and suffering. Jesus' life was one of constant turmoil. Some people loved Him and other people hated him. Some people wanted to make Him king, while others wanted to put Him to death. In Mark 3:21 we read, "When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him for they said, He is out of his mind." One of his disciples betrayed Him and the others ran out on Him. The crowds turned against Him and shouted, "Crucify Him." He was nailed to a cross where he suffered and died.

Yet, in the midst of all this turmoil, Jesus had an amazing inner peace. He said: “Nobody takes my life from me; I lay it down of my own accord.” “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.... Father, unto you I commend my spirit. Thy will be done.” What a wonderful inner peace Jesus had in the midst of turmoil.

How can we have this inner peace Jesus wants for us to have? In today’s Scripture reading, Jesus told us exactly how to have that inner peace. First of all, Jesus said, “Believe in me; have faith in me. Believe that I am in the Father, and that He is in me. Believe in me, and you will have my peace.”

I like the story told in the 5th Chapter of Mark. This is the story where Jesus brings a young girl back to life. It is a story of unbridled belief in the powers of Jesus. In that story a large crowd had gathered around Jesus. A man named Jairus pleaded with Him saying: “My little daughter is dying; please come and put your hands on her so she will be healed.” Jesus continued ministering to the crowd when a synagogue leader said to Jarius, “Your daughter is dead. Why bother the teacher anymore.” Jesus heard this and said, “Don’t be afraid; just believe”. He took with him only Peter, James and John, the three disciples who followed him most closely. When Jesus got to the home of Jarius the people there were crying. He said to them, “This child is not dead but is asleep.” They all laughed at him so he told the non-believers to leave and took the father, mother and 3 disciples into the house. It is apparent Jesus wanted only the truly faithful to be present. Jesus took the little girl by the hand and said “Little girl, I say to you get up.” And the girl was healed. When we really believe in Jesus, that is when we begin to have that inner peace. We have to be careful to keep our minds clear and to not be influenced by those who would laugh at the powers of Jesus.

Most of us in the Congregation remember the turmoil of the Watergate scandal. One of the interesting things that came out of the Watergate hearings is the story of Charles Colson. You may recall that Colson was one of Nixon’s closest advisors. Colson was once quoted as saying he would run over his own grandmother to get Nixon elected President.

Because of his part in Watergate, Colson stood trial, was convicted and sent to prison. The interesting thing is that by the time he went to prison, he was a new man. He got converted right in the middle of the Watergate investigation. One day during the Watergate crisis, Colson met with his lawyer, David Shapiro. The conversation went like this: Shapiro asked, “How do you do it? This has been the worst week of your life. Two criminal indictments, lynch mobs at the courthouse, people howling for your hide and you look like you have just returned from a vacation.” Colson said, “If you want me to explain then I have to start 2000 years ago.” He said, “The lure of power can separate the most resolute of Christians from the true nature of Christian leadership which is service to others. I have found that it is difficult to stand on a pedestal and wash the feet of those who you are called to serve.” He concludes by saying, “True Christian patriots spend more time washing feet than waving flags.”

Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.” When we believe He is with us, then we can have that inner peace that will see us through any conflicts and troubles.

And then Jesus said, “Obey me. If you love me, you will obey me, and then my peace I will give to you.” When we obey Jesus and His teachings that is when we begin to have that inner peace.

In the year 2000, Billy Graham was 86 years old and suffering from Parkinson's disease. In January of that year, church leaders in Charlotte, North Carolina, invited Billy Graham to a luncheon in his honor.

After many kind words were spoken about him, Dr. Graham addressed the crowd and said, “I'm reminded today of Albert Einstein. He was once traveling on a train from Princeton when the conductor came down the aisle, punching the passenger's tickets. When he came to Einstein, he could not find his ticket. He looked in his pockets and briefcase but could not find his ticket. The conductor said, 'Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it.' But Einstein kept looking. He suddenly dropped to the floor on his hands and knees looking under his seat for his ticket. The conductor reassured Einstein it was not a problem. He said again, “We know who you are. You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one.'

Einstein looked at him and said, 'Young man, I too, know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going.'"

Having told that story Billy Graham continued, 'See this suit I'm wearing? It's a new suit. My wife, my children, and my grandchildren are telling me I've gotten a little slovenly in my old age. I used to be a bit more fastidious. So, I bought this new suit for this luncheon and one more occasion.’”

Dr. Graham continued: “You know what that occasion is? This is the suit in which I'll be buried. But when you hear I'm dead, I don't want you to remember the suit I'm wearing. I want you to remember this: I not only know who I am, I also know where I'm going.

Billy Graham – PO. Revival. Don't know the way to the PO.

The inner peace we receive from Jesus tells us who we are, and we are comforted in knowing where we are going.

One of the basic tenants of military warfare is to take the high ground. General Patton told his troops, “Always take the high ground and the enemy will flee.” This is not only a good military tactic but is also a great philosophy for life. Always take the high ground and the enemy will flee. What is the high ground in life? Through Jesus, God has revealed the highest ground in life. Obey Him. Follow Him to the highest way of living. Taking the high ground means to try to do the right thing in all circumstances. We cannot control what other people think about us. We cannot control what other people say about us or do to us. But we do have control over how we respond. That is our choice. We can respond with grace and love and kindness. Real love is not loving someone who is lovable. It is easy to love loveable people. Real love is what we give to unlovable people. When we rely on God's inner peace, we defuse the ill treatment from

others. In Proverbs 16:7 we read, “When the ways of people please the Lord, he causes even their enemies to be at peace with them.”

And finally, Jesus says in John 14:12: “Work with me in the world. You shall do even greater works than I have done because I will be with you.” George Bernard Shaw in his essay entitled, “A Splendid Torch” wrote: “This is the true joy in life: being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.” George Shaw did not mince his words. He goes on to write: “Life is no ‘brief candle’ for me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.”

Jesus calls on us to be that “Splendid Torch”. To live our lives thoroughly as his witness to the world. When we share with Jesus in His work in the world, then He will fulfill His promise of inner peace.

Congressman John Lewis wrote a book called “Walking with the Wind”, a memoir of the Civil Rights Movement of the 50’s and 60’s. I was in college in the 60’s and I became a small part of the protest movements. I recall marching in Boulder, Denver, San Francisco and Washington D.C. His book brought back many memories. He recalls the first time he heard Martin Luther King Jr. preach. The year was 1955. The sermon was entitled “Paul’s Letter to the American Christians.” He’d taken it from Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth, in which Paul criticized complacent Christians for their selfishness and failures of brotherhood. King adapted the lesson in Corinthians to what was happening at that time in 1955 on the streets of Montgomery, Alabama.

John Lewis listened as Rev. King spoke about how it wasn’t enough for Black people to be concerned with streets that are paved with gold, and pearly gates to the Kingdom of God. Lewis recalls, “He said we needed to be concerned with the gates of schools that were closed to black people and the doors of stores that refused to hire or serve us. His message was one of love and the Gospel, but he was applying those principles to now, to today.” Lewis goes on to write: “Every minister I’d ever heard talked about “over yonder,” where we’d put on the white robes and golden slippers and sit with the angels. But this man was talking about dealing with the problems people were facing in their lives right now, specifically about black lives in the South.” This principal became known as the social gospel – taking the teachings of the Bible and applying them to the earthbound problems and issues confronting a community and a society. Lewis concludes by stating, “We as Christians are called to continue with this movement – to take the teachings of Jesus about loving our neighbor, about taking in the alien, about reaching out in kindness and acceptance of others. I believe when we do this, when we open our lives to outsiders – to those different from us – to those whose lives have been fraught with obstacles and difficulties, then we are following Christ’s admonition to obey him and his teachings.”

Louis Evans tells of an experience he had when he found a dog with a broken leg, and that was bruised and dazed. Evans picked up the dog, took him home and nursed him back to health. One day the dog just disappeared. Evans said he felt kind of mistreated by that ungrateful dog. A few days later the dog appeared at Evans' door and had with him a dog that was hurt and needed help. This is our calling. We are called to go out into the world and find those persons who are hurting and suffering. We are to love them and help them. We are to bring them to the Great Physician so that he can heal them and give them new life. When we do this, we are sharing with God in His work in the world. Then we will know the truth of His promise, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you."

This is His promise to you and to me. Believe in Him. Obey Him. Share with Him in the work of His kingdom. If we will do these things, I believe we will find inner peace. He will open new doors of opportunity and will take us places we never dreamed of going. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you."

We now move into our time of prayer when we raise up to our Lord our hopes and dreams for a better life. When we remember the people we have lost. When we lift our prayers for those around us who are lonely, broken, hungry and who are looking for strength to move forward. We pray for our leaders to take us to higher places. We now begin with a moment of silent prayer.

Lord, we feel your presence in this room. Give us the courage and wisdom to leave our disappointments behind and to move forward with faith and hope and charity. We are a good and generous and loving people and country. We can overcome our setbacks and disappointments of the past. We are a strong people. Lord, we survived wars, the Great Depression and intolerance and hatred of the McCarthy era. We survived the tumultuous 1960's and we survived 9-11. Lord, through all of this we as individuals and as a nation rose to the challenge and came out stronger and better. Lord, we know we as individuals and as a nation have made some terrible decisions and have done things we should not have done. But through it all you have showered us with your unending forgiveness, you have shown us the way to move forward, to be better people. Through your Grace, we will survive and we will come out stronger than before. Lord, we know your loving grace is not merited. It is not something we deserve. Rather, your grace is the free and benevolent favor you give to us. Lord, we have been blind, but we want to do better. Visit your grace upon so we can see where we have been blind. Lord, give us the chance, where we have been lost, to find our better selves. One of my favorite Elvis gospel songs asks us this question: "Why me Lord, what have I ever done to deserve even one of the pleasures I know?" Ah, Lord, we know the answer. It is your amazing grace. All of us have been lost but through your grace we were found. Give us the wisdom and strength to use this never-ending grace to see more clearly what needs to be done to build a better world.

We thank you for all you have given to us as we recite the prayer you taught your disciples to pray saying: Our Father.

AMEN

For our Benediction this morning, I want us to continue with the power of inner peace. Unless we have inner peace, we cannot spread the gospel of peace to those around us. Join me in singing, "Let There Be Peace On Earth."