



Sermon by the Right Reverend John R Stephens
October 30, 2022
Episcopal Visit to St. Dunstan's, Aldergrove: Feast of Dedication

It is a delight for me to be with you here at St. Dunstan's this morning. I have been in this building a number of times, but this is the first time as your bishop. I am grateful for your faithful ministry over many years. I am grateful to how you reach out into the community beyond your four walls. I am grateful for how you live out the gospel here and your commitment to spiritual renewal and growth. I am sure that I don't need to tell you but your rector, David is a fine priest committed and dedicated to a ministry that deepens faith and brings people closer to the good news of Christ. He also does much in the diocese as a whole and I am so thankful for that and your willingness to share him.

When our children were young there was a long process related to putting them to bed. If you have children or young children in your life you probably know all about this as well.

There was dinner, then a bath, then into pajamas, then stories and then prayers and then off to sleep. That was the plan and sometimes things even went according to the plan.

It was the same on most nights with some variation on occasion, but for my wife and me, we both felt that the routine was important. Dinner, bath, pajamas, stories of all kinds and then prayers. The stories were varied but things like Goodnight Moon, The Teddy Bears' Picnic, a whole variety of Dr Seuss tales, stories of Spot the Dog or Bob the Builder and a long list of others.

And then it was time for prayers and a chance to give thanks for the activities of the day and for our family and other things that were important for them or for me on that day. And then if I was not already asleep myself, the lights were off and the door closed.

But as I would leave the room, so often I thought about what I wanted for my children, what I prayed for them, what I hoped for them. And mostly that was about peace, a sense of calm. A sense of trust that God was near, there would be peace in their soul, in their minds, in their hearts. That they would know who they were and whose they were.

Jesus walked in to the darkened and troubled room filled with at least 11 disciples... and in my mind's eye he quietly and calmly entered, allowed the silence to grow and a stillness to pervade; then he said to them in a gentle but at the same time discerning voice: "Peace be with you."

All that he wanted for them and was praying for them was in those simple words. Peace be with you. In your soul, in your mind, in your heart, in your living, in your decisions, in your inner wrestling, may you know peace. The same peace that Jesus continues to pray for us now. Even right now. Peace be with you.

And maybe that is the reason that you are here today. Not to hear me say to you, "Peace be with you." But to hear Jesus say to you, directly to you, directly to all the stress and concern and confusion and worry that is part of your life: Peace be with you. The peace that is beyond all knowledge and understanding, be with you. The very prayer that Jesus had for those faithful followers long ago may just be the very words that you need to hear this day. Again, not from me, but the crucified but resurrected one, the saviour, the bread breaker, the storyteller, the Son of God... that one saying the same words to you as he said to the first followers. For we all need to hear this. That we are loved, that we are blessed, that we are known, that we walk not alone in this world, that we are beloved. There are enough other things that we can hear, words we say to ourselves or words from others; we need to hear this. Peace be with you.

There are just so many things in this world that rock that sense of peace within us. We need to hold onto these words like an anchor in a storm, like a rock in a tempest, like an oasis in the desert.

Jan Richardson wrote the poem *Blessing in the Storm*. Hear these words and see if they make sense with that same image of Jesus coming into that room and offering words of such a deep peace that it calms your very soul. Hear these words so that it might affect how you leave this place. That despite all that is going on in the world that you may know God's peace in you and to discover that you are called to be a bearer of that peace, to be a distributor of that peace, to be a sower of that peace, to be a builder of that peace.

She wrote: I cannot claim
 To still the storm

That has seized you,
Cannot calm
The waves that wash
Through your soul,
That break against
Your fierce and
Aching heart.

But I will wade
Into these waters,
And stand with you
In this storm,
Will say peace to you
In the waves,
Peace to you
In the winds,
Peace to you
In every moment
That finds you still
Within the storm.

After repeating his words of peace in that house where the doors were locked, Jesus then said this: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” These words might feel as if they were aimed at those first great saints of the early church. That they were the ones called by these words. Called to live the gospel. Sent as Jesus was sent to reveal the kingdom of heaven, the commonwealth of heaven, whose priorities are centred around the grace and the love of God. And it would be true that these words were at first aimed at those in that locked house. But they did not just stay there. They were meant for us as well. Meant for us who have come to see that we too are called not just to receive the words of Jesus, the words peace be with you, but to receive them and incorporate them into how we live each day. That they might walk with us when we leave this place and follow us throughout this week.

In the reading from the First Letter of Peter a little earlier, you may remember that Peter was urging the people who listened to his letter to pay attention to what was taking place within them. That they were called to be changed. He phrased it this way: Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house...” We are not called to simply hear Jesus’ words of peace but let them transform and change us so that indeed we are living stones, precious in God’s sight.

Recently I read the book, *Namwayut* (num-wee-yut) written by Chief Robert Joseph. Chief Robert Joseph is a large voice in the Reconciliation movement within this country. He is filled with hope that indeed we are called to something more, something deeper, something greater. The word *namwayut* means ‘those with whom you are one.’ This is important as our world tries to move forward. He wrote this in the book: Reconciliation is an ancient imperative. We can sustain the environment, the resources, the cultures, the rituals, and the ceremonies of us all. This is a well of rich history—of practice and tradition, values, and

ethics. And all we've got to do is open the door to all those sources of knowledge, recognizing our value in all the different ways that we live. We've got to learn to live with ourselves first. Love ourselves first. And as we grow as individuals, we can become collectives. We can manifest a higher, larger value and purpose that gives hope and inspiration to nations of people."¹

As I closed the door as my children drifted off to sleep, I prayed that they would know peace in their hearts, minds and souls. I believe, I know, that Jesus prays this for all of us even now. He prays that we would know a deep peace that holds us and grounds us and blesses us at each and every moment. That when we receive the bread and wine of Communion we would see them to be gifts of that same peace, meant to feed us to live into this peace and this hope. Meant to give us strength to be sent out into our world, so that indeed we may be living stones. May it be so in how we live and walk in this world.

¹ Robert Joseph in *Namwayut* page 96