



 **Seattle First Baptist Church** 
Exploring what it means to follow the way of Jesus Christ

Love, Justice, Peace
Dr. Patricia L. Hunter
Seattle First Baptist Church
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This is Memorial Day Weekend, and we remember those who have taken off garment of flesh and put on their robes of immortality. We also remember those who gave their lives in service to our country and we are grateful for their service and their sacrifice. We are making our way towards Pentecost and this is the sixth Sunday of Easter. On Pentecost we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is spoken of in our text today.

Pastor Dr. Tim is at Japanese Baptist Church preaching for the 120th anniversary of that congregation. We thank God for the gifts, ministries, and legacy of Japanese Baptist Church and for Pastor Sam Kim. We pray that God will use Pastor Tim in a mighty way as he ministers to our sisters and brothers in Christ at JBC.

John 14:23-29 NRSV- I will keep some of the male language for God, but will say a word about that later in my message.

Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our **home** with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from (God) the Father who sent me.



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“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom (God) the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

The word of God for the people of God; Thanks be to God.

Jesus said, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my God (Father) will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

To love God and follow Jesus’ teachings is to be at home with God. At SFBC, the concept of home is very important. Our Homecoming is almost as important as Christmas. We want those who have felt marginalized and disconnected from the church to find home here. We want to provide the best in hospitality for those who have felt spiritually homeless. And that is a good thing!

The community who would have read and heard John’s gospel, may not have had a church home, a physical place for worship—particularly if the followers of Jesus had been ostracized from the temple and not welcomed



in their faith communities of birth. Some of us know what it feels like not to have a spiritual home or a faith community to call home. We may have grown up in a congregation where eventually we felt unwelcome, unwanted, or where the theology no longer fit our mature understanding of God and the world. And, until we found a faith community that matched our personal theology, we felt adrift, lost, confused, and perhaps doubtful of our worthiness.

Yet, Jesus tells us that if we love God and follow Jesus, we will be at home with God. God will take up residence with us, and we with God. But wait, there's more—we will also find peace. Even when the world pushes us aside, even when there is chaos swirling around us, God will be our home our refuge, and our peace.

Jesus' use of the word Father is not about gender but about relationship. Perhaps the Inclusive Bible's use of the word ABBA God is closer to what Jesus was trying to communicate. God is as close as a loving mother or father, who will do anything to protect their children. The old hymn writer said, be not dismayed what'er betide, God will take care of you. Beneath God's wing of love abide God will take care of you. So if we love God and follow Jesus, Papa God/ Mama God promises to be with us.

Now, sometimes how we show our love for God and our sisters and brothers could use a bit of tweaking. Amen. Sometimes those who disagree



with decisions made by the church board or the diaconate leadership will withhold their church financial giving. I'm sure that doesn't happen here, but I've heard that it happens elsewhere.

Sometimes when the sun is out we decide to go to brunch instead of going to worship. Or, if it is raining we decide to turn over and sleep another hour and then watch the game. Then we promise to catch the sermon on Facebook sometime during the week.

Yet, the best way we demonstrate our love for God is by how we treat others. Often we think being followers of Jesus means being nice and quiet. We think being a good follower of Jesus means coming to church singing a couple of hymns, saying a prayer, eating a few cookies and going home until next week. But that is not the example Jesus left us. Loving God and following Jesus means we will be uncomfortable. There will be moments of chaos, and at times we will feel like running away.

The good news is that when God has made God's home within us, we can't run away from God, because where ever we go God is with us and God is there. It is that Immanuel thing we talk about at Christmas—God with us. The palmist wrote about it in Psalm 139, if I ascend to heaven you are there God. And if I make a mess of my life and it feels like hell—you are there too. In fact **the only thing you may be certain of in the midst of the storm, is that God is with you.** No matter what, God is with us.



Following Jesus means doing more than just being nice. In many ways, it is about turning the world upside down—particularly when we witness people being treated unfairly. Frequently, churches have the justice rhetoric down. In a progressive Christian congregation, it is easy to talk about justice, but harder to do acts of justice. It is easier to give money to the ACLU than to march for abortion rights. It is easier to wear a rainbow pin and hang a pride flag, than to be an advocate for transgender human rights and speak out against the dozens of black trans-women that have been murdered this year.

Reconciliation expert, Rev. Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil, writes in her book ***Roadmap to Reconciliation***, that we need a catalytic event, a soul shaking event to move us from complacency to action. If we are really keeping God's word, we will be inconvenienced. The real work of Jesus and the work of justice will get confrontational and it will wear us out!

Dr. McNeil writes that chaos will follow the catalytic event, but in order to sustain reconciliation we have to embrace the chaos, keep talking, keep listening, and make changes as we move toward justice and reconciliation.

For those first followers of Jesus, his crucifixion and resurrection was the catalytic event. And, yes chaos among the new band of believers followed. They had to confront their fear, forgive those who ran away and denied



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Jesus. They had to organize, get a strategy and keep moving forward. The writer of Acts wrote that those first followers turned the world upside down. Should we do any less? Do we get a pass and have less required of us? For what does the Lord require of us, asked the prophet?

But to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God.

To those who love God and follow the word of Jesus, Jesus promised the gift of his presence. He promised to be there to help us recall the right thing to do. He promised to be there to comfort, to encourage, to give courage, and victory in the most dire circumstance.

In my early years in ministry, I led many national senior high conferences around the country and at Green Lake, WI our ABC conference center. The camp directors and leaders were to offer our presence during free time and particularly at night under the starry skies while teenage hormones ran amuck. We were to presence not patrol. We called it Presence-ing.

Patrolling would have been easier, but that is not what we were there for. Jesus offers us his presence. He is not on patrol.

When many of us went to MAPS (Muslim Association of Puget Sound) after the senseless murder of Muslims in Queensland, NZ, we offered one another the gift of our presence. We wanted our Muslim neighbors to know



we stand with you. We did the same at the Bet Alif service after the murder of eleven people at The Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA.

When we accompany a loved one to surgery we offer the gift of our presence. There is nothing we can really do except be there as a witness from the community who stands with us.

So Jesus promised that when he was no longer physically present, the Advocate (the Holy Spirit) would be with us. Earlier in John 14:18, Jesus promised not to leave his disciples as orphans. He promised not to leave his friends alone without protection, or guidance. Once again we have that reference to family and home. Jesus promised that we would not be left alone. The gift of the Holy Spirit would be with us.

Finally, Jesus spoke of the peace we will experience once he is gone. Jesus said my peace I give you. In essence, he bequeathed to his followers his peace. Jesus was in a storm while he was speaking these words about peace. But when we are rooted and grounded in God's plan for our lives, we can find peace in the eye of the storm.

Jesus' promise of peace is not a call to complacency. Jesus' promise was not meant to placate as if to say don't worry, be happy. No, Jesus' promise of peace was a call to find strength to face new circumstances that we only find ourselves in because we love God and are following the way of Jesus.



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No matter what comes our way, we have Jesus' peace. Jesus says, I got you! I GOT YOU!!!! In sickness and in health, when grieving the death of a loved one, when surviving incarceration, when going through empty nest syndrome, in financial struggles, in social justice fights, in relationship turmoil, in unwanted pregnancy, when struggling with addictions, when feeling all alone. Jesus said, **do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.** For my peace is your peace. My sisters and brothers, embrace the gift of God's love, God's presence, and God's peace.

The last verse of our closing hymn has these words:

O for a world preparing for God's glorious reign of peace,
Where time and tears will be no more, and all but love will cease.

Please stand as you are able to sing #575 O For a World