

## It Is Well

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost  
Luke 10:1-20

In 1871, tragedy struck Chicago as fire ravaged the city. When it was all over, 300 people were dead and 100,000 were homeless. A man by the name of Horatio Gates Spafford was one of those who tried to help the people of the city get back on their feet. A lawyer who had invested much of his money into the downtown Chicago real estate, he'd lost a great deal to the fire. And his one son had died about the same time, leaving him and his wife with their four daughters. Still, for two years Spafford—who was a friend of the evangelist Dwight Moody—assisted the homeless, impoverished, and grief-stricken ruined by the fire.

After about two years of such work, Spafford and his family decided to take a vacation. They were to go to England to join Moody and Ira Sankey on one of their evangelistic crusades and then travel in Europe. Horatio Spafford was delayed by some business, but sent his family on ahead. His plan was to catch up to them on the other side of the Atlantic.

Their ship, the *Ville de Havre*, never made it. Off Newfoundland, it collided with an English sailing ship, the *Loch Earn*, and sank within 20 minutes. Though Horatio's wife, Anna, was able to cling to a piece of floating wreckage (one of only 47 survivors among hundreds), their four daughters—Maggie, Tanetta, Annie, and Bessie—were killed. Horatio received a horrible telegram from his wife, only two words long: "saved alone."

Spafford boarded the next available ship to be near his grieving wife, and the two finally met up with Dwight Moody. "It is well," Spafford told him quietly. "The will of God be done" (<http://www.jmm.org.au/articles/10145.htm>). Though reports vary as to when he did so, Spafford was led during those days of surely overwhelming grief to take those three words, "it is well," and incorporate them into the hope-filled refrain of a hymn that has comforted the Christian Church for over a century. Indeed, the lyrics of the hymn no doubt were great comfort to us this morning as we sang it right before the sermon. Hear again the first verse, "When peace, like a river, attendeth my way; when sorrows, like sea billows, roll; Whatever my lot, Though hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul" (*LSB* 763).

As we reflect on the Gospel reading during the sermon this morning, it is my prayer that we come to believe more firmly the truth of the first line of Spafford's hymn, even as he borrowed those words from the prophet Isaiah, "When peace like a river attendeth my way" (Is 66:12). Just as Jesus sent the seventy-two out to proclaim to all a Gospel of peace with God through Christ, I pray that we would come to see ourselves more and more as *active participants* in the expanding mission of God's peace.

Jesus sent the seventy-two out to carry on his Ministry, announcing that God has come to visit his people to bring peace in a right relationship with him. Therefore, the seventy-two are to call people to repentance. Jesus has sent them to speak a message of peace. He says to the seventy-two, "Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace be to this house" (Lk 10:5). They are to spread the peace of God to all so that all may believe more firmly that in every situation, "It is well!"

On this 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend our minds are thinking a lot about peace. We pray for peace on earth and we train and equip soldiers to fight for peace and to preserve peace at home in our nation. We long for people to get along with one another. We long for justice to reign and for an end to come to social injustices that run rampant in our nation and around the world. We pray for an end to human trafficking and abortion. It is healthy to long for this kind of justice in our world. It is deeply human to have this kind of longing for peace and justice. But should we *only* be concerned about a state of peace and justice with one another? What about peace with God?

It is deeply human to long for peace and justice because as humans we are crafted in the image of our Creator. The Bible describes God, our Creator as one who is just and merciful all at the same time. He is a God of peace and so we have that same desire and longing for peace and justice as his creatures. But the peace of God is a peace that the world cannot give (Jn 14:27; Phil 4:7). He knows that unless we are united once again in relationship with him then as human beings we will be continually searching for peace in this world that only God can give. The Christian theologian and Church Father, St. Augustine, famously said, "Our hearts are restless, Lord, until they find their rest in you." Until we receive the peace of God that flows like a river, we cannot truly say, "It is well with my soul."

God sent Jesus into the world to reconcile and reunite God with the world he created that has rebelled against him in Sin. God sent Jesus on a mission to bring peace. In our Gospel reading Jesus commissions seventy-two others to join in an ever expanding mission of spreading the peace of God. So what does this peace of God look like?

*Shalom* is the Hebrew word for "peace." In the Bible, "peace," often takes on the mean of "wholeness" or "completeness." The very fact that God's mission in this world is a mission of peace says something about us as his creatures. We are not whole. We are not complete. Something is missing. This is what Sin does. In Sin we rebel against God's Will and his Ways. We decide that we know best. And it breaks us.

Through the person of Jesus of Nazareth God has come in human history to do something about it. God has broken the heavens and come into our world to make us whole and complete once again as his creatures. He has come to satisfy our longing for peace. He has come to bring peace like a river that flows into our hearts, into our lives, and into our homes. It is the peace that comes from a different source. In our longing for peace and justice in this world we seek to bring peace "from below," hoping it will work. Organizations like "Peace Corps" work tirelessly to bring this kind of peace. All the while, God has already come. God has brought peace "from above."

When Jesus sent his disciples out he said, "If a *son of peace* is there, your peace will rest upon him" (Lk 10:6). Jesus is that Son of Peace. He has come to put to death the rebellion of Sin and its deadly effects. Through his broken body the firstborn Son gave up the peaceful relationship that he had with God, the Father. He exchanged his status as the Son of Peace to become the man of lawlessness and Sin in order to, once for all, destroy its power to break you and me and separate us forever from our Creator. His sacrifice was the perfect peace offering so that now God's peace pours forth—"peace like a river that attendeth my way." And now it is well with our bodies and souls. Now we are complete and whole through the peace that only God can give. And so now we share. We are caught up in the ever expanding mission of spreading God's peace. In the Divine Service on Sunday morning when we celebrate communion we share this peace. We exchange it with one another after the Prayer of the Church. We receive this peace when we receive the body and blood of our Lord in the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper. And God sends us forth to live in his peace at the end

of the Service. He commissions us to be participants and to join not only those seventy-two but also to join Horatio Spafford and the whole Christian Church in the mission of bringing peace “from above” to this world down below. “It is well!” Amen.