

In about 20 minutes, the Rev. Raymond Walker III,  
priest in Christ's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church,  
will call us to our feet and offer to us the Peace of the Lord.

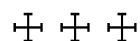
Assuming the new guy doesn't somehow mess that up,  
we will offer it back to him and then turn  
and offer God's Peace to one another.

If we aren't paying attention it can seem like nothing more than a formality.  
The signal for halftime in the service,  
a chance to say hello to the people around you.

Ritually, though, we are enacting something very important in our service.  
Ritually, we neither offer nor receive the Peace of the Lord  
until we have heard God's word, confessed our faith,  
prayed for the needs of the world, confessed our sins,  
and accepted the forgiveness which is God's alone to give  
and Fr. Raymond's solemn duty to convey.

The Peace of the Lord is, or should be,  
like a word of welcome given to a lonely prophet,  
like a cup of cold water given to a thirsty child.

This Peace of the Lord comes only after we are renewed  
through those acts of devotion,  
and it is only when that we are at peace with God and one another  
that we are all invited  
"to the banquet of that most heavenly Food."



Remember the Peace of God while I tell you a story

from today's Old Testament lesson.

It's the story of a time when the Peace of God

was nowhere to be found among God's people.

Two thousand, six hundred sixteen years and eleven months ago -

Jeremiah was nice enough to give us the date on this one -

the prophet Jeremiah and the prophet Hananiah

were at odds with another,

and the stakes in their debate were literally life and death

for the people of God.

The Babylonians had conquered Judah

and all of the other countries in the region.

Meanwhile Egypt, the only other major power at the time,

was weak and being totally dominated by Babylon.

But then there was a rebellion in the Babylonian Army

- yes, just like Putin this week! -

and Egypt was finally starting to get its act together.

All the other small countries thought, "This is our chance!"

"We'll ally ourselves with Egypt and rebel against Babylon.

We'll cast off our yoke and be free nations again!"

Most of the countries did rebel,

but in Judah there was a fierce debate about whether they should,

and the debate was between two prophets,

Jeremiah & Hananiah.

One prophet stood up in the house of the Lord,  
in the presence of the priests and all the people, and said,  
“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel:  
‘I have broken the yoke of the King of Babylon.’  
So rebel, be brave, and within 2 years all that was  
taken away in exile WILL BE returned to you.

But then the other prophet stood up, in that same house of the Lord,  
in front of those same priests and people, and said,  
“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel:  
‘Do NOT rebel against the King of Babylon.  
The Lord has given us over to the Babylonian king for now.  
If we rebel now Babylon will wipe us out  
and we will perish forever.’”

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The stakes could not have been higher.  
Do they fight to be free and risk being destroyed,  
or wait patiently and lose their chance at freedom?

Two respected prophets offered two entirely different prophecies.  
Both wanted the very best possible outcome for their people.  
Both were fully convinced their vision was the righteous one.  
Both claimed to speak in the name of God,  
but in their division there was no Peace for the People of God.

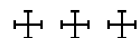
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So, how did it end?

I'll only say that the people of God survived,  
and that it did not go well at all for one of the prophets.

But I don't want to say which argument won the day because it's summer,  
and you've got plenty of time to pull out your Bible  
and read chapters 27-28 of Jeremiah  
to discover the whole story for yourself.

Truthfully I don't want to focus on who won  
because I think the more important question for us this morning  
is what do we do when God's people are divided?  
What do we do when we are not at Peace with one another?



This morning, Jesus tells us that whoever welcomes a prophet  
in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward.

I wonder if he was talking about Jeremiah, or Hananiah, or both?

We face a lot of questions in our nation right now. Important questions.  
Some are life and death. All of them matter for human flourishing.

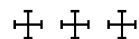
Climate change. Abortion law.

Immigration. Gender identity among minors.

This week the news was about racial preferences, free speech,  
and debt forgiveness. Soon it'll be national elections, voting access,  
and who knows what else?

For every single issue we face there will be people  
who believe they speak with the righteous conviction  
of a prophet of the Lord when they say, “We must go this way!”

And there will be others, with that same righteous conviction,  
who say, “No! That way!”

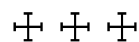


Choosing the right path matters, and we shouldn't pretend it doesn't.  
And they can't both be right, and we shouldn't pretend they are.

Christians, like every other resident of this nation,  
have the responsibility to stand up for their beliefs  
and to stand against the people who take us  
in the wrong direction.

When you leave this place, you are told to love and serve the Lord  
and the people you meet. To make the world a better place.  
You have a responsibility to hold fast to your convictions  
about what that looks like on the issues of the day.

But we would do well to remember the story of Jeremiah and Hananiah,  
to remember that people with the best of intentions  
sometimes get it wrong,  
and that sometimes the one who gets it wrong, is you.



On this Independence Day weekend, how is our little section of  
Christ's Church called to serve this nation we love?

Should we be the place where the life and death issues of our day  
are debated and where a call to action is boldly demanded?

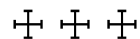
Maybe. Certainly God has called the Church to that task at times.

Except here at Holy Trinity we don't all agree on the solutions  
to the world's problems,  
and sometimes we don't even agree on the problems,  
which means some of us would be left behind.

Or here's a more pointed way to put it.

I was very happy with at least two of the Supreme Court decisions  
that came out this week,  
but I know some of you saw them as a miscarriage of justice.

When Fr. Raymond bids us to our feet in a few minutes,  
will we be at peace with one another?



I have this picture of Holy Trinity in my head.

I'm not telling you it's the divine word of the Lord of Hosts.  
I'm not even telling you you have to agree.

I'll just say I pray and think about this a lot  
and it's the picture I keep having in my head.

At this time in the life of this nation that we love,  
I can't think of any more important role for Holy Trinity Parish  
than to be a place that offers the Peace of the Lord to one another  
and really means it.

As we segregate ourselves out there into allies and enemies,  
I have this picture that once a week, in this place,  
we pause to remember that at an even more fundamental level  
we are all beloved of God.

That once a week you come here, you enact these rituals,  
you rise a renewed and forgiven person  
and you offer the Peace of the Lord to one another.

I have this picture of us,  
as a witness to the world and in full consideration of what it means,  
pausing once a week to offer the unconditional  
and full-hearted Peace of God,  
to the very person who thinks the path to a better world  
runs in the opposite direction that you think it does.

What greater act of both Christian love and patriotism is there,  
for THIS time and THIS place than to remind ourselves  
and anybody who sees us that the Jeremiahs and the Hananiahs  
are both welcome here, that they are both beloved here,  
that we remember they serve the same God,  
both want what's best for the world,  
and run the same risk of being wrong in their convictions?

The picture in my head is that out there,  
you strive with all you have for what is right,  
and once a week you remember the deeper truth:  
that we are all beloved of God,  
and that if God will offer the Peace which passeth  
all understanding to even somebody like me,  
then how can I refuse it to someone else?

Amen.