

A Different Peace, Tim Keller

We're going to look just at two verses. I'm going to read only two verses, two very compact verses that we come to in our study of the Book of John. John 14, I'm just going to read verses 26 and 27.

²⁶ “But the counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave you; my peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

This is God's word.

We're at the bridge between the Thanksgiving season and the Christmas season. Thanksgiving, we talk and think about gratitude. Christmas, we talk and think about peace on earth. You'll see that both of them are encompassed in this little bit of teaching here. For years and years, I have, at the top of any funeral service I do, simply stated the words of Jesus Christ in verse 27, *“Peace I leave you; my peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”*

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The reason I love to quote that is because you've got an entire treatise on the subject of peace in that one verse, verse 27. We're told three things. First of all, Jesus is the giver of peace, *“My peace I give to you.”* Secondly, that Christ's peace is qualitatively different than any other peace you can have. *“Not as the world gives, give I unto you.”* Thirdly, then we learn that Christ's peace is the antidote. It's the direct opposite of fear. *“Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”* Three things. **Christ gives peace. It's a different peace than any other peace you can get, and it is the absolute antithesis and antidote to fear.** You'll never see any place in the Bible that tells you it's wrong to be sad. There's a lot of places in the Bible that exhort you to be joyful, but there's never any place in the Bible that tells you it's wrong to be sad. As a matter of fact, the Bible is always telling us to rejoice in our sorrows. The Bible is assuming that Christians will be sad. Why? Well, because we live in a very, very sad and painful world.

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Maybe before a person is a Christian, a person actually tries to... you may try to harden your heart against the sadness of the world, or you may try to avoid places or people that will bring you into direct contact with the sadness of the world, at least as long as you possibly can. But once you become a Christian, because of the peace that Christ gives you, there's a sense in which you are drawn into the sorrows of the world even more deeply than before. You have a tender heart, the Bible says, not a stony heart. You get involved with people. The Bible, in a sense, says that Christians are assumed to be people who are always sad. Jesus was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. We're supposed to rejoice in our sorrows. But the point is, the Bible never says we're supposed to rejoice in our fears. The Bible never says that Jesus Christ was a man of fears. He was a man of sorrows. The peace the Christ brings can be enjoyed in the midst of sorrow because it's not antithetical to sorrow, but it is absolutely antithetical to fear. Here's my peace, therefore you can't be afraid.

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There's the test, and this is an acid test, and this is a searching test. Don't ever fall into the very unbiblical, and I could explain where it comes from, but the very unbiblical test that says, a Christian is somebody who's always happy. That's not a biblical test. Jesus failed it constantly. But what it does say, what the test is, if you are a Christian, your fears will be diminishing. If you had a perfect love relationship, relationship with God, there'd be no fear. If you're growing in your relationship with God, you are less afraid than you were last year. That's the test. That's the acid test. It's very frightening because so many of us will recognize that we think we're doing better in a lot of other places. But the scripture says God's peace eliminates fear, not sorrow. Now, if that's so important, then we have to understand what it means and what the teaching is. So let me just outline it for you. But I'd like to do backwards, Jesus says in this order, I give you peace. I don't give you a peace like anybody else can give you. And this peace will be the antithesis of fears.

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I like to work backwards. I like to first talk about the opposite of peace, which is fear. I'd like to talk about the counterfeits of peace that you might accidentally or be deceived into. Then lastly, I'd like to talk about how Christ actually does give it to you. I like to work backwards through the verse 27. First, first of all, it says, If you have my peace, there'll be no more fear. Now, where does fear come from? Fear comes from sin. In the Bible, we're told in the Garden of Eden, the first result of sin was fear. The first result, the number one result. Well, now, what's sin? There's a boogie word for you. If we're looking back at this Genesis 3, we will see there's a lot of ways to define sin biblically, but we will see the Bible defines sin as saying to God, "I don't need you." That's sin, saying to God, I don't need you. Here's Adam and Eve, and they're in the garden, and the Bible tells us that every day God came and walked with them in the cool of the garden. When God came near, they ran to God.

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What was the language of their hearts? They knew no fear. The language of their hearts is, if the greatest thing, if the greatest one in the universe is my friend and support, what could I be afraid of? If God is for us, who can be against us? That was the language of their heart. We're told that the moment they decided that they knew better than God... See, the moment they decided, God said, "Don't eat this tree," but that is an unfair infringement on our personal freedom and our individual rights. We want to eat of that tree. The minute they decided they knew better than God, even though they didn't, I'll put it this way, they decided they didn't need God. The moment you think you know better is the moment you say, "I don't need you," the moment you say, "I don't need you," the moment your relationship is broken. And instantly, we're told, they were naked and ashamed. That meant they felt vulnerable, they felt exposed, they felt defenseless. And we are told as soon as God showed up, Adam runs and jumps into the bushes and he says, "When I heard you come near, I was afraid."

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Now, what the Bible teaches is at this point is absolutely a profound analysis of our condition today. The Bible says that the lie of the serpent in the garden was that if you move away from God, you'll move away from fear. See, the serpent says, "You're not free. You need to be yourself. You're under his thumb." That was the lie that Adam and Eve listened to. You're under his thumb. You're enslaved, you see. You're afraid of him. You need to move out to move away from fear. The Bible shows us that when you move away from God, you don't have done with fear; you actually discover fear. Fear works opposite of what the world might tell you. Fear gets greater as you move away from God. Last week, I think it was, maybe two weeks ago, there was an article on the New York Times on how black churches in New York are dealing with AIDS. At one point, the writer says, if I wrote it down here, at one point, the writer of that article said, "One of the problems is the black churches, most of them believe every word of the Bible is true, and therefore they have a dim view of sex."

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The article goes on to say, "It's a shame that these people have this belief in the Bible. That's the reason they have a dim view of sex. That's the reason why they see they're bound with fears, and they can't talk about these things, and therefore, they can't be free. Now, not only if I had a time, I'd say that this is another example of tremendous paternalism on the part of the knowledge classes trying to impose their values on the working classes, their secular values on the working classes. But we don't have time for that. Instead, let me show you that that's the lie. The lie is, here's Christianity. You know why you're afraid? Because you're bound by the law, you believe in God, you're submitting to God, a wrathful God. You've got to get away from religion if you want to get away from fear. Religion is the opiate of the people. That's what keeps you enslaved. You've got to be free. As you move away from religion, as you move away from God, you'll move away from fear. Yet the Bible tells us that it's exactly the opposite. The reason we have a spirit of fear is because as we move away from God, we move into fear."

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As we move away from God, we discover fear. The Bible says, If you have decided that the tenets of religion cramp your style financially or sexually or professionally, and you've moved away from God, what you're doing is you will move into a spirit of fear. You will be characterized by a spirit of fear. Let me show you how that works out. It's absolutely true. Fear comes from saying to God, "I don't need you." That's what it comes from. For example, as you move away from God, a human being has a experience of radical finitude. You sense your finiteness. It was interesting a year ago or so, obviously more than a year ago, when the San Francisco earthquake happened. One night, on one of the news programs, I heard a psychologist interview, and whoever, they asked the psychologist the question. He was trying to help people deal with the stress and trauma of the earthquake. Somebody said, It seemed like our ancestors just didn't use to fall apart when it came to disasters. Our ancestors used to bury half of their children before they reached maturity. They took troubles and tragedies in stride. Now, why is it that when we have a tragedy, everybody's got to run on in and help everybody because they feel so traumatized?

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The psychologist was marvelous in his frankness. He says, "Well, think of it this way. First of all, our ancestors believe that they were small in a big universe that was controlled by God, and they knew God, and they prayed to God, and they didn't have the same sense of being powerless." Or he says, for example, "For our ancestors, this life was a small part of reality. You lived here for a while, then you died, and you went into heaven." Then he turned and he says, "But you see, for us, this life is all we have. Not only that, we're the only ones running this world. When something like this comes along, we feel so powerless and helpless, and it engenders tremendous trauma." I was amazed at his frankness. Why is it that today we will sue? We get into litigation over things that a generation ago people just considered, "Well, that's just the way life is." Because you see, a generation or two ago, we believed that we were small, that we only lived here for a while, and then there was eternity. We were small, and there was this great big world, but today we believe, no, there must be a human problem behind any imperfection.

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We are masters. We are in charge. But as a result, whenever tragedies hit, we are absolutely traumatized. There's no way that we can deal with tragedies and troubles the way our ancestors could. The psychologist was right. The more you move away from God, the more you feel that finiteness. The more you move away from God, the more you feel powerless and helpless, like somebody in a place that's way too big for you. Or look, fear also comes from the purposelessness that comes when you move away from God. Nietzsche had a great approach to things. Nietzsche said, "If you decide that God is dead, if we realize and recognize that God is dead, what we need is people who will be able to handle the fear." See, Nietzsche said, for example, "If God is dead, If God is dead, there's no right and wrong, and there's no meaning in life." For example, if there's no God, if there's no God who speaks to us, or if we don't know if there's one, if there's no afterlife, or we don't know there's one, if there's no judgment, we don't know if there's one. We don't know what the right and wrong is.

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How do you know slavery is wrong? If there's no bigger reality than nature, how do you know slavery is wrong? By looking at nature and seeing that it's so obvious that the strong should not oppress the weak, of course not. When you look at nature, you see that everywhere. How do you know that slavery is wrong? There is no way to know it. What Nietzsche was saying is when you get rid of God, there is no way to be certain about your purpose, why you're here, what is right and wrong or anything. That's why what need today in the modern world, said Nietzsche, was the ubermensch, the Superman, the person who doesn't need meaning, who doesn't need to know what's right and wrong, a person who can deal with the fear that comes from knowing there's no God. See, all Nietzsche is doing is proving what Genesis 3 said is right. When you move away from God, you don't lose your fears. When you move away from God, you discover your fears. Or look at your fear of the future. A lot of you are perfectionists. You know why? You're afraid of the future. See, if you knew the God who was in control of the future, you didn't have to worry.

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But if you don't know the God who's in control of the future, then you're always saying, What if? What if? What if? Why is it that some of us can never get married? Because as soon as we get close enough to the person, we begin to find all kinds of faults, and then we big out. Why? We don't want to entrust ourselves to anything less than a perfect person. Why? Because we're afraid of the future. Why? Perfectionism is just fear unrampant. Why? I've got to do it. I'm the only one here. I'm the master of the universe. What am I trying to say? Fear comes from saying to God, "I don't need you." It's like this. Imagine a child walking into Macy's, a little child holding her mother's hand for the first time. He walked into Macy's and the child says, "Mom, let go of my hand. I can get around. I know it." Your mother says, "Don't be silly. For you, this is a vast endless place. You'll never find your way around and you'll never find your way back to me." The little girl holds on to her mother's hand, but inside she says, "First chance, I'll show you."

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At the first chance, away she goes. She says, "Ha, I'm free. I'll show her. First of all, I remember there was a little ice cream I'm going to stand back here, and I got 25 seconds. I'm going to buy myself something. Wait, it should be here. All right, maybe it's down here. Wait, it should be here. Oh, no. I'm lost. I want my mommy. No, wait a minute. If I go back to mommy, she'll say, I told you so. I'll ask somebody else where the ice cream stand is. But what if there are kidnappers?" What's happening? A spirit of fear. Have you ever been a child who's lost? That is exactly what the Bible says is the condition of every human being apart from God. Here's our problem. We are too small for the position that we've taken. We were built to hold God's hand in the universe. When you let go of God's hand, you are trapped by a spirit of fear. Now, what has to be done, or just another example, imagine that you've been promoted into a job, you applied to a job, and you got the job that you knew you could do when you got in, you realized you were absolutely unqualified and totally incapable of it.

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You don't have the gifts, you don't have the aptitude, you don't have the training, and you're not going to be able to get it. What happens? The spirit of fear. What is sin? Sin is taking on to yourself a position in the universe that is too big for you? What's the solution? The solution is God's peace, but I'll move to that. But just for a second, what's the solution? What's the solution for the headstrong child who's trapped by a spirit of fear? What's the solution for the employee who realizes that he or she is not capable of this job? The only way to get out of the fear is to go back to the mother or go to the boss and say, I was a fool. I need you. I can't do this on my own. Don't you see that? You see, the thing that will keep that child in fear is that she's still afraid of admitting to her mother that she was wrong. The fear of obeying, the fear of depending on God, is the one fear that's the key to every other one. If you can't go back to the mother, if you can't go back to the father, if you can't go back to the boss, if you can't go back and say, "I need you, I was a fool to think I could do this on my own."

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All the other fears will run rampant in your life that we've been talking about. But if, on the other hand, you can overcome your fear of obedience to God, all the other fears will go away. Some of you say, "Well, I've never said to God, I don't need you." But if you are saying to God, "In this place, in this place, I know better than you. I know this is wrong, but I know better than God." Then you're saying, "I don't need you." You're going to have a spirit of fear that's continuing in your life. Every week when I say something like, "You need to say to God, I'm flat out for you. Whatever you say, I will obey. Whatever you send into my life, I will accept and learn from. I give myself to you completely." Every week, I have somebody, usually that calls me or comes to see me and who, he says, "But I'm afraid. I'm afraid. I'm afraid if I give myself to God flat out, that I'll look like a fanatic. There's strange things in the Bible, aren't there? Who knows whether I believe all of it?" It's the fear of obedience, the fear of going back and saying, "Mom, I was wrong. I need you." Now, the antidote, we've already begun to look at it, is peace. But Jesus also says that there are some counterfeits to peace. He says, *Peace I leave you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world gives, give I unto you.* Let me just suggest two ways that you can tell true peace of Christ from counterfeit peace, from the world's peace. First of all, the true peace of Christ is an intelligent peace, not a stupid peace. Some years ago, I remember a friend of mine who's now a doctor, but back when he was in med school, he told me that when he first got involved in medicine, when he first saw just all the deformities, when he saw the horrible things, the horrible injuries, the horrible deformities, the horrible diseases, when he began to read his books and saw how many germs there really are out there with your name on it, when he saw all the things that were really fragile about the human body that could go wrong. At one point, he said to a professor, "When you see all this suffering and you know about all this, how in the world do you stay sane?"

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And the professor says, "Like all intelligent people, you stay sane by not thinking too hard." I could go to plenty of books and plenty of great literary works that basically say the same thing. If you want peace, don't think too hard. The difference between that peace and Christ's peace is this. Christian peace, the world's peace comes from closing your eyes to the truth. Christian peace comes from opening your eyes to the truth. See, Christian peace arises from greater awareness of your true condition. Are you a Christian? Then you're adopted, you're accepted, you're loved, and you're an heir to the throne of the universe. If you're a Christian, then you know God is holy and loving and wise, and he's going to deal with this. If you're a Christian, you know what your future is. You see, the more a Christian, talks about that and thinks about that, the more a Christian thinks the more peace he gets. The doctor says, "You want to have peace? Don't think too hard." The Christian says, "You want to have peace? Think harder." You see the difference? They're completely different. You see, friends, if you are, if Christ is your savior and you know all these great things, then the greater your alertness, the greater your awareness, the greater your peace, thinking and reason becomes your friend.

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Jonathan Edwards says, "Christian peace and only Christian peace is a reasonable peace." It's a rational peace. You thought that Christianity, you thought faith meant stop thinking. Oh, no. Christianity says, faith, and especially peace, comes from when you begin to think. Now, what peace can the world give? If you don't know there's a God, if you don't know if he's there or not, all you can do is to stop reflecting too much, because if you reflect too much, you'll see that life is a terminal disease. If you reflect too much, you'll begin to see that you don't know why you're here. You don't know what in the world you should be spending your time doing. There's no way to know that. You don't know what is right and you don't know what is wrong. See, if you reflect too much, the world's peace doesn't work. The world's peace comes from closing your eyes. The Christian peace comes from opening your eyes. The world's peace comes from, "Don't think too much." The world's peace is always irrational, and the Christian peace is the most rational of all. Now, secondly, another counterfeit, Jesus says, *Not as the world gives, give I unto you.*

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But Christian peace is constant, and the world's peace is intermittent. See, what is the world's peace based on? Circumstances! A really attractive person asks you out, you got a raise, you got a promotion. These things, though, my friends, the things that the world's peace are based on, even the most durable of them are like bubbles on a water. You know, the most durable ones, the ones that stay for a while, like a good marriage, the thing that really tears you up inside is even those things, those circumstances, which are your peace, that look like they last for a while, you know deep down inside, especially as you get more and more attached to them, as they become more and more your peace, you realize that they're temporary, and it will drive you crazy unless you take refuge in the peace of stupidity, which is to say this will go on forever. But it won't! On the other hand, Christian peace is based on what? Based on things that can never change. That's the reason why Psalm 46, the psalmist says, *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth be removed, though the mountains be cast in the midst of the sea.*

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Now, you see, when the mountains get cast in the midst of the sea, everything that a world's peace could be based on gets moved. Your home, your livelihood, your spouse, things like that, all those things are moved with the mountains. But Christian peace is not based on anything that the mountains can possibly touch, and therefore, Christian peace is a constant. It's relentless. It's not intermittent. We know that the things that the Christian peace is based on is not going to change when the body dies. It's not going to change when the mountains are removed. It's not going to change when the whole world is rolled up as the stage set we know it to be. Christian peace is like a river that just doesn't run dry. Okay, lastly, *My peace, I leave you. My peace, I give you.* Now, we've seen the opposite of peace, and we've seen the counterfeits of peace. But how do you get Christ's peace? The answer is, first, you'd really miss it if you didn't realize the context. Jesus is talking to his disciples about dying. He's about to leave them. He's going to die the next day. Now he says, *My peace, I leave you.*

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What does that mean? He says, This is my last will and testament. The secret of this verse is that Jesus is leaving them peace in his will. Now, we all know that things that you leave in a will do not come to the recipients until the testator dies. And unless you understand that the peace of Christ comes only because he died for you, it's completely wrapped up in his death. It's the legacy of his death. Until you see that this peace can only be left to you by a dying Christ, you're never going to understand peace. Because you see, Christian peace is not just subjective, it starts being objective. Christian peace is based on this, that Jesus Christ died and paid every debt and fulfilled every requirement you have before the Father. Christian peace is based on that. He has given you a clear deed, a clear title to adoption in the family of God. Now, how does that work? Into your life? Take a look and see how Paul does it. Paul in Romans 8 takes this truth and works it out, and listen, if you really read Romans 8 the way it was supposed to be read, all you would do is yell.

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Next time I'm here reading Romans 8, I'm going to have to yell because that's all it is. *If God is for us*, he says, *Who can be against us?* If God has made me acceptable, who is to condemn? What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Anything I do, anything you do, nakedness or peril or sword or famine? No! In all these things, we are more than conquerors. All he's doing is yelling. What is he doing? He's working subjectively out the truth that's objectively there. The objective truth is that Jesus died, therefore I am right with God. Now, does your heart act like that? Is your heart, when you come to those cries in the New Testament, do you cry out? Does your own heart cry out like that? If not, you don't understand peace. See, a Christian heart says, "Shut up heart; with all of your guilt and your performance-oriented anxiety, you will never be my peace!" And a Christian heart says, "Shut up, world; with all of your opinion in changing fashion, you will never be my peace!" And the heart turns around and says, "Death. Shut up, death! Spare not, do thy worst. Come, just try to get me. And wait till you see what happens." See, a Christian's peace arises out of the death of Christ until you see that he died for you, until you build your life on the fact that he died for you, until he's your dying savior, not just your moral exemplar you will never know that peace, ever, ever. But then look closely, how does that peace grow? Some of you say, "Well, I understand that, but I don't know that I've got that much peace." Some of you Christian friends, you say, 'Look, I understand that. I know that, but actually, I'm not growing in peace, and my fears are still there.' Well, don't forget verse 26. It says, The Holy Spirit's job is to remind you of all the things that I have said. That's what Jesus says. Then immediately says, *Now my peace I give you, my peace I leave to you.* The peace comes When you allow the Holy spirit to take Jesus' words and to drill them in. If you want to do that, by the way, if you want to deal with fears, I urge you to go to Romans 8 to sit down and open it up.

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Now, the first thing you have to do is you have to say, "Unless the Spirit speaks to me, unless the Spirit opens my heart and warms my heart so I can see the realities here, I'm not going to find this peace because this comes from the Holy Spirit showing me what Jesus said." The worst thing you can possibly

do to a person who's full of fear is to say, "Pull yourself together." That's exactly what a person who's afraid can't do. I mean, that's psychologically, tremendously unhealthy to say, "Pull yourself together." Jesus never says that. Instead, he says, "Open my words. Seek my Spirit, and I will drill them into you." So, you go to Romans 8, and you see what is Paul doing? Paul is dealing with his fears by working out the truth of what Jesus said. He's just working it out. He's working it in. If Jesus has done this, if God has done this, if this, if that, if he has done this, if he has done that, good night, what am I afraid of? That's exactly what he does. If you just will let him lead you through that. Friends, if you lack this peace today, I challenge you.

[00:30:21.330] - Speaker 1

There's only several kinds of reasons for this. Number one, some of you have decided you don't need God, you don't need his law, so you're disobeying what he says. The Spirit's fear-killing work can never happen in your life. Because it's the Spirit's job to show you what Jesus said, includes his commands. If you've got a bad conscience, no wonder you're afraid. Or secondly, some of you, some of you know intellectually that you're forgiven, but deep down inside, you feel like, "But I shouldn't need his charity." You're still kicking yourself. You're still pricking yourself, still saying, I'm such a bad person. You know what that means? You're saying to God, "I don't need your charity. I don't need your grace." God said to Peter, "What I have made pure, do not call impure." You may be talking about yourself that way. Don't you see? Some of you are just so busy that you're not spending time in prayer. You think that the Holy Spirit is going to work if you don't give him time. When you say, "I don't need your law, I don't need your grace, I don't need your fellowship," you're not going to have his peace because that's where the fear came from to start with.

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Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. Let's pray. Father, as we come to the table, we want to see you, and we want your peace as we eat and drink. We thank you that the table is the place to get the peace of the Lord. That's what we ask for now, and we ask for it. We ask that your Spirit would take these truths, that your Spirit would take these truths that they would really become part of us. We ask now that as we take the cup, as we take the bread, that we will find that we've taken you and we've received your peace that was bequeathed to us through your death, which we now commemorate, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.