

## ***Based on Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 58:9b-14 Pentecost 11; Proper 16***

### ***Isaiah 58:9b-14***

*If you remove the yoke from among you,  
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,*

*if you offer your food to the hungry  
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,*

*then your light shall rise in the darkness  
and your gloom be like the noonday.*

*The LORD will guide you continually,  
and satisfy your needs in parched places,  
and make your bones strong;*

*and you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water,  
whose waters never fail.*

*Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;*

*you shall be called the repairer of the breach,  
the restorer of streets to live in.*

*If you refrain from trampling the sabbath,  
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;*

*if you call the sabbath a delight  
and the holy day of the LORD honorable;*

*if you honor it, not going your own ways,  
serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;*

*then you shall take delight in the LORD,  
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;*

*I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

One of the most curious commands Jesus gives to his followers, just before he sends them out on their first 'solo' missions is "As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you." Oftentimes I think we understand peace as something passive. We understand peace as the absence of something; the absence of conflict, noise, aggravation, or violence. But when Jesus talks about

peace, He seems to mean something different, or rather something more. He seems to mean something like what the prophet Isaiah is talking about in this passage.

Isaiah is answering an age-old question here; what is a “good” life? What does it look like, how do we live it, and further, how does a community live together a “good” life? Isaiah tells us that the first step is let go of our anger and our fear and to begin to focus on lifting up others. To lift our gaze from our own navels and to look into the eyes of our neighbors. The second step is to build our lives around the creative energy that underpins our existence, in other words, God. And then the rest of the passage describes the fruits of taking just those two steps. And it is the carrying out of these two choices that delivers us into peace.

There are things in this world to be afraid of, like man-eating tigers on the loose, or great heights to fall from. But, for the most part, we are confronted with very few of those kinds of immediate threats and instead too often we fear things we imagine might happen. It is these kinds of fears that cause us to act in self-interested ways, to overlook the needs of others, and which feed our anxiety.

Peace then, is the intentional act to push aside those fears, and with God’s help, to live as non-anxiously as possible. Faith then, is a kind of resilience that dampens our instinct to fearfulness and enable us to live courageously as we become agents of God’s love in the world.

If peace is the cultivation of fearlessness and a retreat from selfishness, Jesus’ command begins to make a lot more sense. In the situations where life leads, if you cultivate a non-anxious presence, it can become infectious. People respond to that and take comfort and strength from it. But, if people are too lost to their fears and their anxieties for your peace to affect them – don’t let yourself be infected by their fears but let your peace, your courage, your non-anxiousness return to you instead.

So, go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.