

Peace

John 14:27, 1 John 2:7-11

April 22, 2012

Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid.

Do you hear it? Good! Then live it!

Somehow I got on the email list of a fellow in Oelwein who sends out a dozen or so group emails a day, most of them forwards. Bob -- I'll call him Bob, because his name is Bob! -- Bob considers himself an ardent patriot and a devout Christian and his emails are clearly intended to promulgate his political and religious views. This is one of the emails I received this week. It's headlined, "What the Fire Chief said."

What the Fire Chief said

For those who understand, no explanation is needed.

For those who do not understand, no explanation is possible.

Not fair to make judgment of this, until you see what the Fire Chief says!!!!

In South Los Angeles , a 4-plex home was destroyed by a fire.

*A Mexican family of six, all welfare recipients and gang members,
Lived on the first floor, they died.*

*An Islamic group of seven welfare cheats,
All illegally in the country from Kenya , lived on the second floor,
And they, too, all perished in the fire.*

*6 LA, Hispanic, Gang Bangers, & ex-cons,
Lived on the 3rd floor and they, too, died.*

*A lone, white couple lived on the top floor.
The couple survived the fire.*

*Jesse Jackson, John Burris and Al Sharpton were furious!!
They flew into LA and met with the fire chief, on camera.
They loudly demanded to know,
Why the Blacks, Black Muslims and Hispanics,
All died in the fire and why only the White couple lived?*

*The Fire Chief said,
"They were at work"*

This has just got to keep on circulating...it's too good....

It's too good? What's good about it?

Is it good because it makes the point that all these freeloaders got what they deserved, that their deaths were their own fault because if they had been gainfully employed they would have lived?

Is it good because it makes Jesse and John and Al look foolish, because these and all those like them who go around crying and whining about injustice are put in their place by four simple words from a fireman: "They were at work?"

Or is it good because this story reveals the truth, the truth that is the plague of our nation: that blacks and hispanics and muslims are lazy, shiftless good-for-nothings sponging off society, in contrast to hardworking whites who are, of course, the backbone of our society?

The first thing you need to know is that the story is simply not true. There was no such fire. This is just another one of those internet legends that takes on a life of its own as it circulates the web.

The story has appeared in various forms, involving varied victims and set in varied locations. Sometimes the fire was supposed to have happened in LA, sometimes New Jersey, and sometimes East London. The victims are Kenyan or Nigerian, Mexican or Albanian, hispanic or muslim or black.

The question to ask is, if the story is not true, why make it up? And why does it get such wide play? Why is it believed? Why is it "too good not to pass on?"

I can answer that question with one word: hate. This email is nothing but hate speech. It's thinly disguised -- no, that's not right! -- it is blatant racism.

The Mexicans are all on welfare and in gangs.

The black muslims are illegals and not merely on welfare, they're welfare cheats.

The hispanics are gang-bangers and criminals, while the white folks -- the folks like us, of course, because who other than whites would be presumed to compose or forward or read this email -- the white folks are doing what white folks do; they work.

It's all about hate. Hate prejudices, generalizes, stereotypes. Hate belittles and mocks and ridicules. Hate disparages and dismisses and despises. Hate rejoices in evil. Hate can even find gladness in death, in the deaths of those it despises. Didn't people hate Jesus this way? He was mocked and despised. People rejoiced in his death.

If we say that we are in the light, yet hate others, we are in darkness. If we hate others, we are in the darkness; we walk in it and do not know where we are going, because the darkness has made us blind.

How do we fathom such hatred -- so deep, so venomous, so blind? What is its source? In what soil does it grow? What brings such hatred to birth?

Again, I can answer with one word: fear. Fear drives hate.

Fear of loss. Fear of losing my privilege, of losing my entitlement, of losing my way of life. Fear of losing my distinctiveness, of losing my exclusiveness, of losing my identity. Fear of losing dominance. Fear of losing control.

Fear of my loss, fear of another's gain. Fear of other people benefitting unfairly. Fear of other people taking advantage of the system, taking advantage of me. Fear of other people getting what they have not earned, what they don't deserve.

Fear of loss, fear of another's gain, fear of the other. Fear of the unknown. Fear of the alien. Fear of what is different and strange. What is different and strange threatens me, so I respond by pushing it away, by prejudging it, by hating it.

What do we do with all this fear and all this hate? That's easy! Nothing! We don't do anything, we don't need to do anything about it, because it's not us.

But it is us! There is fear in us, too, in all of us, fear that colors behaviors and attitudes, fear that stifles grace and generosity, fear that is a seedbed for hate. That fear may be well-hidden, the hate may be less blatant, less extreme, but it is there, perhaps even more insidious, even more dangerous, because it is hidden, because it seems reasonable.

It is us. It is us because they are us. Bob and all his friends are us. We share a common humanity, and sharing a common humanity, we share a common responsibility for our humanity.

But, you ask, "Am I my brother's keeper?" You know the answer to that question! As long as any hate exists among us, we are all implicated. We are all responsible. It is us.

So what are we going to do? What do we do with all this fear and all this hate? We listen to Jesus! "Do not be afraid!"

Even if the earth shakes and mountains fall, we will not be afraid ...

Even if the seas roar and the hills are shaken with violence, we will not be afraid ...

Even if nations are terrified, we will not be afraid ...

Even if planes are crashed into towers and bombs are exploded in crowded marketplaces, we will not be afraid ...

Even if our cities are filling up with people strange to us and different from us, we will not be afraid ...

Even if we become part of the minority -- ethnically or politically or religiously, we will not be afraid ...

Even if the economy sags and unemployment soars, we will not be afraid ...

Even if I lose my job, I will not be afraid ...

Even if I feel threatened, even if I feel maligned, even if I feel hated, I will not be afraid ...

Do not be afraid.

But how? What takes the fear away? Jesus does. Jesus takes the fear away, because Jesus gives us peace. Jesus gives us the gift of peace. Peace is a gift, not an achievement, not a wish, not a plan, but a gift. And this gift is yours!

Jesus does not give it as the world does.

The world achieves peace, through violence or through intimidation, but it is not real peace. It is merely a temporary lull between hostilities. It is never lasting, but always precarious.

The world plans for peace by providing security measures, but providing security, bolstering defenses, building walls, leaves us more isolated, more insulated, more suspicious, less welcoming, less tolerant, less connected.

The world wishes for peace by seeking peaceful places, by seeking peaceful experiences, by seeking inner peacefulness, but it is not real peace, just a distraction, just a means of self-medication.

Peace, real peace, is not an achievement or a plan or a wish. It is a gift, Jesus' gift, Jesus' gift of his own peace.

And what is Jesus' peace?

Jesus' peace is intimacy with the Father, trust in the Father, love from God his Father. If hate is birthed by fear, peace is birthed by love.

Jesus' peace means following the path of obedience to the Father's will, all the way, in spite of resistance, in spite of opposition, in spite of threat, in spite of hate. And when Jesus followed that path what happened? He was hated! He was killed!

And when Jesus followed that path what happened? God raised him from death to life, proving there is nothing in all creation that can ever separate us from God's love! Not fear, not hate, not death ... nothing!

Jesus put complete trust in the love of God. And he lived. And he lived in peace. Jesus lives. Jesus lives in peace. Jesus lives giving us the gift of his own peace.

Jesus gives us the gift of being held securely in the embrace of God's love, love that drives out all fear, love that makes all hate entirely unnecessary, because when we live in love, we live in the light. We are not blind anymore. We see things, we see people, as they really are: blacks, muslims, hispanics, Albanians, Mexicans, Nigerians, Kenyans, Bob.

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Do you hear it?