

**Goal: That the hearers would rejoice through problems by God's gifts to us.**

We're in the long season of the Church Year called Pentecost. The green signifies new growth and so we focus on how we grow in our faith and our walk with Christ. Pentecost is a time to grow from being a rock in the stream of life to being a leaf. Picture a fast moving, clear stream. Now, imagine a rock tumbling down the stream hitting every submerged log and boulder, maybe even getting stuck in crevices. Now see a leaf floating on the surface of that same rushing stream. It goes up and down, twists and turns in the current, but it's above the perils beneath.

Pentecost is a time for us to grow above this world and today Jesus calls us to grow beyond what the world considers peace, an end to warfare or partisan politics. He wants us to grow beyond expecting even a little peace and quiet. But I don't live that way? When I'm overwhelmed I tell myself that when I complete a task, then I'll be at peace. Or once I go through this, then I'll have peace. I read the Bible and I pray hoping for just a brief moment of peace. But Jesus wants me to grow above this. He says, ***“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” (Matthew 10: 34)*** So, I'm chasing something that Jesus says doesn't exist: peace on this earth. No wonder I'm a rock being thrown up against every log and boulder. That's reality slapping me in the face.

Jesus wants me, and each of us, to grow above this world's understanding of peace and family. But who doesn't want a close family or peace at home? Robert Frost wrote, *“Home is where they have to take you in.”* Isn't that the truth? Isn't blood thicker than water? Well, blood may be thicker than water, but it's not thicker than baptismal water. Baptism unites us more thoroughly to those in Christ than to those outside of Christ. Christ divides sons and fathers, mothers and daughters, brides and mothers-in-law, a home against itself. ***“I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.” (Matthew 10: 35 – 36)*** He came between Cain and Abel, Abraham and his family, Moses and his, Job and his friends.

The Water, the Words, the Body and Blood of Christ have a higher claim on us than even family. Mark Twain has Adam's tombstone inscribed: *“He would rather live outside of paradise with Eve than inside without her.”* That's the choice Adam made and

it's the choice the devil, the world, and our selves calls us to make. Choose family over Christ. Choose words the family can agree on rather than Christ's words. Choose the fellowship of your own flesh and blood rather than that of the Body and Blood of Christ.

But even in Christ's family, His brothers didn't believe in Him, His mother thought Him *"beside Himself."* He even confessed, ***"For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*** (Matthew 12: 50) And He calls us to confess this too. Our ohana is made up of those who hear and hold to the Words of Christ. That means even if all our biological family on earth was gone, our ohana would still number more than the stars of heaven or the sand on the seashore because our family is the one, holy Christian apostolic Church.

Jesus invites us to grow above what the world calls peace and family, but also to grow beyond ourselves. Now, when I'm looking for peace in this world, I'm fixated on me, myself. The Greek word translated *"life"* is also translated *"self."* ***"Whoever finds his self will lose it, and whoever loses his self for my sake will find it,"*** (Matthew 10: 39) So much for *"self-esteem."* I've met the enemy and it's me. I can try my best to ignore the peace this world seeks and to value my spiritual family above my physical one, but as long as there's one breath in my self I'll fail.

This is where all Christian living breaks down. I can't grow above this world; I'm joined to it because I came from its dust. I can't grow beyond this world by my own efforts. Only the power of God can make that happen. And the path to grow above the world's idea of peace and family, to being free of my self is God's promises in Christ.

You're feeling stressed in this life. Sickness threatens, family troubles mount, the world is in upheaval because of wars, politics, the economy, floods, and fires. God's promises in Christ assure you that in your Baptism you died to all this. What do dead men care about sickness, family problems, or the world's troubles? Your Baptism joined you to Christ and He took that world-loving self and joined it to His crucified Body so that when He was buried, your self was buried too.

But that's not the end. When Christ was raised by the Father's glory, you too were raised to walk in a new life just as Jesus did. ***"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."*** (Romans 6: 4) Before Jesus died, His

soul was troubled. Because He bore your sinful self He knew your lack of peace, your stress, your chaos and He bore it all the way to death. He buried it and left it in the tomb.

Then He arose to a new life where God is at peace with Him. His life is your life and you are to walk about as Jesus did on Easter morning. Did He worry about sin? Was He troubled about death? Was He stressed? No. Jesus was free of sin, of death, and of your sinful self, and in your Baptism into Jesus, so are you! The self you're powerless to kill; Jesus killed, and gave you a life that floats above the world's idea of peace and family. The new life Jesus gives you is in the ohana of righteous people.

It is painfully true that confessing Christ and His Word can cost you family ties here on earth, but that confession ties you, unites you to all of God's holy ohana who've ever lived. When you get to heaven, Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sara, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Peter and Paul will embrace you as ohana. That the same Word that dwells in them dwells in you; the same holiness of Christ that covers their sins covers yours too.

Are you starting to float a little yet? Starting to see you more as a leaf and less as a rock in the stream of life? The more you focus on self the more you'll sink. So don't focus on your self because Christ is focused on the new you. And He keeps track of even the littlest things you do in His name. (***"The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."***) (Matthew 10: 41 – 42)

But the sinful self still clings to us till we're called to glory like a loose splinter that nags constantly. It runs a balance sheet and is upset when things look unequal. But Jesus assures us to ignore the sinful self's calculating because He's keeping track and He's only taking note of the good we do in His name. He forgives and forgets all the rest.

By God's promises in Christ, preached into your ears by His pastors, placed on your body in Baptism and put into your mouth in Communion you've been called to go through life as a leaf not a rock. Sure you're in the same swirling stream; sure its twists and turns and ups and downs will make you feel out of control, but you won't crash when peace can't be found in this world, when families clash, when the sinful self suffers. You'll float above these because Christ has given you to a whole new ohana, and a whole new self. Now this twisting, turning, churning stream of life filled with sunken logs and rocks, can only carry you to that still pool of eternal, living water. Amen.