May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

“*Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house*.” (Lk 10:5)

So let me ask you this. What does peace mean to you? What comes to mind when you think of peace? What does it look like? What shape does it take?

I think most of us have an understanding of peace that is too small and too narrow. We limit peace to a particular set of behaviors and usually they are the behaviors we expect or want from the other person. We’ve convinced ourselves that peace will come when this person or that group changes or stops doing something. Ultimately, we condition peace on our ability to change or control another.

Jesus did not send the seventy out to change the towns and places they would go but to simply offer his peace. How often does Jesus instruct us to go and change other people? He doesn’t. That may be our way but it’s not his way. Jesus does, however, spend a lot of time teaching us to change ourselves and our way of being toward another. That’s the change of heart that is at the core of peace.

The struggle for peace begins not between me and another but within myself. So let’s consider what **a heart at peace** might look like

* What if a heart at peace is about loving our neighbor as ourselves? It would mean that the other person, regardless of who she or he is, counts and matters as much as we do. A heart at peace refuses to lump masses of unknown people into lifeless categories such as Liberal, Conservative, gay or lesbian, Muslim or ISIS member or any ethnic group, and make them objects to be dealt with or enemies to be defeated. A heart at peace encounters everyone as a person. It looks another in the face and recognizes itself. So, tell me, what do you see when you look in the face of another?
* What if a heart at peace is about loving our enemies, doing good to those who hate us, turning the other cheek, giving our shirt to the one who has taken our coat, and doing to others as we would have them do to us? If that’s about peace I have to wonder whether I really want peace and whether I am willing to pay the price. Some days my answer is yes and other days not so much. What about you?
* What if a heart at peace means being merciful and not judging, refusing to throw the first stone, and taking care of the log in my own eye rather than the speck in the eye of another?
* What if a heart at peace offers forgiveness not seven times but seventy times seven? Are we willing to do that?
* What if a heart at peace means feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and imprisoned? Before we can ever do that, we must first regard the life, needs, and desires of another as important as our own.

Peace does not begin with our behaviors toward each other but with our way of being toward each other, our seeing each other as human beings created in the image and likeness of God.

Offering the peace of Christ is more than a friendly handshake, a warm hug, or a “How are you? It’s good to see you.” It’s the recognition of another’s existence and his or her value as a human being, regardless of whether he or she is family, friend, stranger, or enemy.

The peace of Christ is not defined by the absence of conflict but by practice to be lived every moment of every day of our lives. That means practicing peace with our friends and family. It means practicing peace with our enemies. It means practicing peace with the stranger, with those who are different from us, and with those who scare us.

Let’s not forget that when Jesus sent the seventy they went without a purse, bag, or sandals. Now don’t literalize that. It’s a metaphor for the baggage we carry, the baggage that continues to trip us up and deny us a heart at peace. It is the baggage of our past experiences, fears and wounds, grudges and resentments, pre-judgments and assumptions about others, old solutions and beliefs, our need to be right or better than the other, and sometimes our desire to play the victim.

So let me ask you one last question. What baggage might you need to leave behind to go into the world fully equipped with a heart at peace?

“*Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house*.” Amen.