

Recent Events in Ferguson

We have all heard on the news the recent outbreak of violence in Ferguson, Missouri. Despite repeated calls for peace, in the hours following the announcement that Officer Darren Wilson would not be charged in the shooting death of Michael Brown, the scene in Ferguson was anything but peaceful. Buildings have been burned. Looters have smashed windows and grabbed what they can. The National Guard has been called in to help quell the violence.

The unrest began back on August 10, the day after Michael Brown was shot and killed. What began as a peaceful protest soon turned into looting, destruction, and tense standoffs with police. For more than 3 months, peace has delicately hung in the balance as everyone awaited the decision of a grand jury as to whether the officer would be charged with criminal action.

Surely we can't comprehend what would drive a person to seek justice in stealing from a local business. We can't understand how someone thinks burning down a building is making a positive statement. But that's just the thing about sin. Martin Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles (III.I) that original sin is such a deep corruption of human nature that no reason can understand it. The depth of our sin can only be believed by the revelation of God. We can only know how bad it really is with us from God's Word. We don't want to acknowledge it but the inclination, desire and ability to loot, to riot, to burn down a business, and even more, is found in you and I. If you don't think yourself capable of doing such things, then you don't have a very good grasp of human nature. The reason why peace is so precarious is precisely because of sin. We are by nature enemies of God, and if we are enemies of God, there is no hope for true and lasting peace here on earth. In the coming days and weeks and months and years, Ferguson will begin to return to normal. The damage will be cleaned and repaired. Businesses will return. But that does not yet mean that we have found peace.

Jesus says to His disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27). The peace of Jesus is a peace different than what the world gives. The peace of Jesus is a lasting peace, an enduring peace, a peace that calms troubled hearts. He gives this peace just hours before He will be executed for crimes He didn't commit!

When Jesus suffers under Pontius Pilate, He suffers for sinners. When He dies on the cross, He dies for looters, for arsonists, for police and criminals alike. He dies for me and for you. His death brings peace - not just on earth, but true and lasting peace between God and man.

True peace cannot stay buried in a grave. The first thing Jesus says to His disciples after His resurrection is, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19). Then He shows them His hands and side. Peace is with you because Jesus was crucified. Peace is with you because He bled for you. A second time He says, "Peace be with you," and this time He follows it up with the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Receive the Holy Spirit," says Jesus, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld" (John 20:22-23). This peace is yours when your sins are forgiven for the sake of the One who was crucified.

Peace is not found in the absence of earthly conflict. True peace isn't when protesters have dispersed and the police can take off their riot gear. True peace is found in the wounds of Christ. This is a peace that surpasses all understanding. It's a peace that no reason can grasp, but is yours by faith.