

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The past two Sundays, we heard gospel passages containing Jesus' words, "Peace be with you." Last Sunday we heard Jesus' words, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:46b-48, NRSV). Today, my letter is about peace among peoples of all nations and peace among God's creation.

Last Sunday, my aunt and I went to the Riverside International Friendship Gardens (in Riverside Park) in La Crosse. Our walk provided an opportunity to see some of this season's earliest flowering plants, bushes and trees. It also provided an opportunity to think about peace.

Photo #1, is of the Celtic Cross in the Irish garden. The cross is a reminder to us of Christ's death and resurrection. Yet, it almost seems to direct our eyes to move beyond it. Surrounded by the natural beauty of God's creation, it is at the confluence of 3 rivers--the Mississippi, Black and La Crosse. In this international friendship garden, the cross can remind us of Jesus' call to proclaim his name to all nations and to encourage peace.

Photo #2, is of a feature in the German garden. It depicts a large pocket watch from La Crosse's Sister City in Friedberg, Germany. (Watchmaking is an important vocation in that community.) The watch includes the words, "connecting cultures and peoples," and "a living friendship."

Photo #3, shows another view of the pocket watch in the foreground, and the rotunda, or Besedka, of the Russian garden. The Besedka, provides a connection to La Crosse's Sister City, Dubna. We can see the word, "Peace," written on the curved area below the dome.

Photos #4 and #5, are from the French garden. They are of blossoming bushes that remind us of the beauty of spring. (To see other photos of the Chinese, French, German, Irish, Norwegian, Russian, and Cameroon gardens, to hear audio descriptions, or to print a scavenger hunt, go to [www.riversidegardens.org](http://www.riversidegardens.org).)

While the full international friendship garden and the beautiful setting along the 3 rivers invites us to celebrate God's creation, these early blossoms remind us of the many other flowering plants, shrubs, and trees yet to blossom. It can also be a reminder of peace that is yet to blossom. Visiting the garden is one way in which we can be reminded of God's call for peace among people of all nations and all that God has created. Thanks be to God.

Peace,

Pastor Cathy