

Psalm 122  
John 14: 25-31

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost  
World Communion Sunday  
Midway Presbyterian Church  
October 1, 2017

### **An Instrument of God's Peace**

#### *Introduction to the Psalm*

Our Psalm today was originally sung by Pilgrims on the way to celebrate one of the major festivals in Jerusalem. Thereafter it was used as a song of praise for Jerusalem and a prayer for the city's peace. Listen to these words from Psalm 122...

#### *Introduction to the Gospel Lesson*

Our Gospel Lesson is from a section of John called "The Farewell Discourse." Here we find some of Jesus' final words to his disciples as he prepares to depart. But they will not be left alone, for he promises the gift of the Holy Spirit to be with them forever. Another gift that Jesus will leave with them is his peace. Listen to these words from John 14:25-31...

#### *Sermon*

A long time ago, late in the twelfth century, in the year 1182, in the town of Assisi in Italy, a man named John was born. The son of a wealthy merchant on the way to following his father into business, John spent his youth as a dashing young "man-about-town." For a while he was a soldier. But one day as he prayed in a small church in Assisi, he felt the call of God to follow Christ in serving the poor. And John renounced his father's fortune, gave his rich clothes to a beggar, and under the new name of Francis, went on to practice the peace of Christ for the remainder of his life.

It is the beloved, beautiful prayer of St. Francis of Assisi which provides the inspiration for this sermon. Next to the Lord's Prayer, this prayer is one of the most complete and inspiring prayers that I have ever heard. Let me read it to you in full:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
 Where there is hatred, let me bring love.  
 Where there is offense, let me bring pardon.  
 Where there is discord, let me bring union.  
 Where there is error, let me bring truth.  
 Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.  
 Where there is despair, let me bring hope.  
 Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.  
 Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.

O Master, let me not seek as much  
 to be consoled as to console,  
 to be understood as to understand,  
 to be loved as to love,  
 for it is in giving that one receives,  
 it is in self-forgetting that one finds,  
 it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,  
 it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life. Amen.

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.” Certainly there is nothing more important, more worthy of our devotion than the service of peace—the peace of God. And on this World Communion Sunday we rightly promote peace through our Annual Peace and Global Witness Offering.

A while back, it was reported that in just one week, in one high school—Bryant High School in Omaha, Nebraska—there were three separate incidents of high school students committing suicide. So troubled, so stressed, so pressured and tormented by life that the only way out, the only way they thought they could find peace—was suicide. It is not that life in Omaha, Nebraska, is so overwhelming compared to other places, for we are told that suicide ranks second on the list of the causes of death among teenagers in the United States, with accidents first, and homicides third.

Who among us has not at some point in our lives been in such pain and distress, so lacking in peace and harmony that we have at least contemplated the sweet peace of no longer having to face the struggle. The Psalmist once implored:

“O that I had wings like a dove!  
I would fly away and be at rest.” (Ps. 55:6)

So how might we describe this peace of God? The word peace in Hebrew is *Shalom*. *Shalom* is not merely freedom from trouble, but all that makes for people’s well being, both personally and communally. *Shalom* does not imply pacifism; it does not refer to those who will not go to war, but rather to those who actively seek to bring conflict to an end and establish peace.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, Jesus speaks of the gift of his peace. The peace which the world offers is the peace of escape, from refusing to face things. One form of that is in the offer of drugs. The peace of escape. To that we should “just say no.” The peace which Jesus offers is the peace of purpose, fulfillment, and victory over difficulties. It is a peace the world cannot give, nor can it take away. It is the knowledge and joy of our eternal salvation. To that offer we should “just say yes.”

If we look at the New Testament account of the life of Jesus, we see that he had many problems to face. Pharisees out to get him. People who didn’t believe him. Betrayal. Denial. Crucifixion. It is obvious that Jesus, Son of God, man of peace, didn’t live a life of perfect bliss. He was on occasion, angry, as when he overthrew the tables of the money-changers in the temple; visibly upset and disturbed, as when he was about to enter Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and wept over the city crying, “O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, if only you knew things that make for peace”; as when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “He began to be sorrowful and troubled,” and he said to them, “my soul is very sorrowful, even to death.” Many struggles.

Many trials and tribulations. And yet we know him as the “Prince of Peace.” Well, his peace he would give to us.

In the fifth chapter of Matthew we have the Beatitudes. Among them is this one: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” Notice it is the peace *makers*. Not necessarily the peace *lovers*. It is possible, for example, to allow a threatening and dangerous situation to develop, arguing that for the sake of peace, we will not act, we will not get involved. But the peace which the Bible calls blessed is not from the evasion of issues; it comes from facing them, dealing with them, and conquering them. What this beatitude demands is not the passive acceptance of things because we are afraid to do anything about them, but the active facing of things, and the *making* of peace, even when the way to peace is through struggle.

These peace-*makers* shall be called sons of God. That is to say they are doing the very work which the God of peace is doing. They are instruments of God’s peace.

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.”

“Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.”

“Blessed are the peacemakers.”

Here at Midway we’re an instrument of God’s peace when we join with African American Churches in our area to promote unity and goodwill. And we’re an instrument of God’s peace when we express love and care for someone going through an illness, a sorrow, a trial or tribulation.

Some of us may say, “Well, that sounds great, but I don’t know if I can be an instrument of God’s peace when I’ve still got some struggles of my own.” Let me say as clearly and forcefully as I can—no one who is a peacemaker is without struggle. As we’ve said, Jesus wasn’t.

A doctor does not have to be in a 100% perfect state of health to bring healing. He could be a diabetic, or have elevated blood pressure, or be near-sighted. A parent does not have to be all-wise, and all-patient, and all-everything to raise a well-adjusted child. A preacher does not every single Sunday have to be brimming with confidence and full of a faith that can move mountains in order to be an instrument, a voice for God's word of peace. In fact, an awareness of facing difficulty may help us to be a better instrument of God's peace. Note that St. Francis' prayer is not a plea for perfection. It focuses not on the self, not on me. It is an appeal to God to use me (imperfect as I am) in service to God and others—"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

St Francis of Assisi would go to any length to preserve life and peace. Once he asked one of his companions sent out to gather firewood, "not to cut down the whole tree when seeking wood. Let the tree sprout again, he said, in praise of God." He called the animals he met "brother," treating them respectfully because they were God's creatures, and so elevated the significance of all life. St. Francis sought the peace that didn't contain the seeds of the next war.

Vladimir Lenin, one of the founders of the communist revolution in Russia, wrote this amazing statement in the book Letters on Modern Atheism:

I made a mistake. Without doubt an oppressed multitude had to be liberated. But our method only provoked further oppression and atrocious massacres. My nightmare is to find myself in an ocean red with the blood of innumerable victims. It is too late to alter the past, but what was needed to save Russia were ten thousand Francis of Assisi."

Friends, what we need today in our homes, our churches, our schools, our businesses, our governments, are thousands of peacemakers. During Communion today, I challenge you to think of one way you can be a peacemaker with yourself, and one way with someone else, near or far. "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with us."

God called John of Assisi...and God calls you and me to the same work. Let us hear his call and answer it. Let us be an instrument of God's peace. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Amen and Amen.