

Psalm 85:8-13
John 14:25-31
Galatians 5:22-23

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost
Midway Presbyterian Church
July 17, 2022

My Peace I Give to You

Introduction to the Psalm

In our Psalm today we hear an Old Testament announcement of “on earth, peace among those with whom God is pleased” (Lk. 2:14). This peace is God’s *shalom*, or “well-being,” that comes with God’s salvation. It’s a peace not known apart from covenant loyalty, faithfulness, and righteousness. Listen to these words from Psalm 85:8-13...

Introduction to the Gospel Lesson

In our Gospel Lesson, as he prepares the disciples for his death and departure, we hear Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit and the gift of his peace. This peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but the blessing of a right relationship with God. This is a peace unlike what the world can offer. Listen to these words from John 14:25-31...

Introduction to the Epistle Lesson

In our Epistle Lesson we hear again the fruits of the Spirit. These are wonderful gifts of God that are conceived in those who belong to Christ. Our focus today is on that third gift—the gift of peace. Listen to these words from Galatians 5:22-23...

Sermon

In her book, *A Very Present Help: Psalm Studies for Older Adults*, Miriam Dunson tells the following story:

I am a reluctant aunt, especially when it comes to roller coasters. This became apparent when I went with my fourteen-year-old nephew to Six Flags over Georgia in Atlanta several years ago. All day Todd begged me to ride the roller coaster with him. All day I resisted, until just before time to return home.

I realized that if I did not have that pinnacle experience with him, he would never let me forget it. So we boarded the roller coaster. It was up and down, twisting and turning, upside down and downside up, racing toward what I felt to be sure death. It was all right going up the inclines, just slowly chugging along. It even could be boring, if anticipation of what was coming did not overshadow it. Suddenly, flying down the slope I was absolutely sure that I would not survive when we hit the bottom. But I did survive. I was thankful that it was over and that I had made my nephew very happy. I am not sure what he reveled in most, that I rode it with him or that I was scared out of my wits. After that experience, I vowed to myself that I would never, ever, ride a roller coaster again. I think the reason I made that vow is that riding that roller coaster is too much like real life. Slow on the uptake, a little boring at times, but when the difficulties come on the downside, survival is not in the picture.

By the way, the book is in our church library.

Yes, we live in a world that can bring fear, distress, illness, and loneliness. While also it can bring opportunities for enjoyment, enrichment, and friendship. We can know the depths of despair and the satisfaction of a job well done.

When we were younger, we thought retirement would bring a life of rest and leisure. There would be time and money to travel, visit family members. But for many, getting older brings an unexpected health challenge, grief over the loss of a loved one, financial struggles.

We need to hear the words of Jesus:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid (Jn. 14:27).

Author and deaconess in the Methodist Church, Rita Snowden tells a story of war. In France some soldiers with their sergeant brought the body of a dead comrade to a French cemetery to have their friend buried there. The priest told them gently that it was a Roman Catholic cemetery, and he was bound to ask if their comrade had been a baptized adherent of the Roman Catholic Church. They said that they did not know. The priest said that he was very

sorry, but, if that was the case, he could not permit burial in his churchyard. So the soldiers sadly took their comrade and buried him just outside the fence of the churchyard.

The next day they came back to see that the grave was all right. And to their astonishment they could not find it. They knew that it was only six feet from the fence of the burying ground, but search as they might, they could find no trace of the freshly dug soil. As they were about to leave in perplexed bewilderment, the priest came up. He told them that his heart had been troubled because of his refusal to allow their dead comrade to be buried in the churchyard. So, he told them that early in the morning he had risen from his bed, and with his own hands he had moved the fence to include the body of the soldier who had died for France. That is what Jesus can do. The rules and regulations put up the fence; but the love of Jesus moved it. Jesus can remove barriers that separate people, because he brought to us a religion whose foundation is love and peace.

The peace which the world offers is the peace of escape, from refusing to face things. One form of that peace 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, wholeness, 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 know a life of perfect bliss. He was on occasion, angry, as when he overthrew the tables of the money-changers in the temple, those who were turning a house of prayer into a den of robbers (Mk. 11:15-18); visibly upset and disturbed, as when he was about to enter Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and wept over the

city saying, “O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, if only you knew things that make for peace” (Lk. 19:41-44); 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.” (Mt. 26:36-39) Many struggles. Many trials and tribulations. And yet we know him as the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). Well, his peace he would give to us.

In Paul’s second Letter to the Church in Thessalonica we find these words:

Now may the Lord of peace himself
give you peace at all times and in every way (3:16).

In her commentary Beverly Gaventa says that whatever these people of Thessalonica endure in the present, whatever rebellion and lawlessness threaten them in the future, whatever perils exist that they experience because of their own disorder, they can confidently expect to receive the gift of peace from the only one who is able to provide it (*Interpretation*, p. 133).

When we fix our minds on God and put our trust in him, it produces deep, lasting peace in us. When we believe that he is our good, gracious, and loving Heavenly Father, we can rest even though storms surround us. Our peace is not dependent upon our circumstances. Rather, our peace comes from Christ. It is not a peace that the world can give, and it is not a peace that the world can take away.

But the gift of God’s peace is not to be kept just to ourselves. It is to lead us to be peacemakers. In the fifth chapter of Matthew we have the Beatitudes. Among them is this one: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children 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, comes not from the evasion of issues; it comes from facing them, dealing with them, and conquering them.

These peace-*makers* shall be called the children 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.

Many people of faith love that beautiful Peace Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. 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:

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 today, more worthy of our devotion than the service of peace—the peace of God. As we try to cope with all the disorder created in policies to deal with a global pandemic. As we reckon with the outcome of contentious Supreme Court decisions. As we face the stress of the shooting of innocent people and the stress of those who flame racial tension. As we hear threatening words from Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.

Here at Midway we're an instrument of God's peace when we join with other churches in our area to promote unity and goodwill. When we deliver meals to residents of the community. When we have for the community a Blessing of the Animals Service that recognizes the

important relationship we have with all God's creation. 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. We're an instrument of God's peace when in prayer we bring someone to God's throne of grace. My friends, what we need today in our homes, our churches, our schools, our businesses, our governments, our media, are thousands of peacemakers.

God called Francis of Assisi, and God calls you and me to the same work of peacemaking. Let us hear his call and answer it. Let us thank God for the gift of his peace. And let us be instruments of God's peace. With the assurance of Paul's words to the church in Philippi:

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7).

Amen and Amen.