



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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September 5, 2021

The Things That Make for Peace

Luke 19: 37-44

Today we begin a new series called *A Season of Peace*. I think most of us would say we want peace. Most of us would want to be peacemakers. Most of us would think that peace is a good thing to have in our lives and in the world. It is in no way controversial to say I want peace. Who could possibly be against that? A good friend of mine in Cincinnati lost his dad this week and my prayer for him was that he would find peace. Whenever I lead the prayers of the people, I always end with prayers for peace and almost always include the line, may peace come from our lips first. I do this not because I am a wonderful man of peace, but because I need that prayer for me. I am very aware as I consider myself a person of peace that my first instinct is often one of anger or violent emotion, even if that doesn't always show itself.

Isn't that the way for many of us, we desire peace, we love the idea of peace, yet anger and frustration and concepts of revenge often boil up inside us before any thoughts of peace. We speak of finding peace in our lives, yet stress and worry keep us awake at night. We know Jesus brings peace, yet we feel far from it often. And we know that sometimes, for there to be peace there must first come the most awful violence. I watched the movie *Final Account* this last week, which comprises of interviews with elderly Germans who were participants in the Hitler's Third Reich. It was fascinating to watch as they recounted the horror of that time with shame, regret, acceptance and sometimes denial. What awful violence had to be endured for Europe and the world to find peace. We have those same struggles today. Some would argue that war is best waged by doing justice as opposed to military action while others tell us a strong military presence is required to maintain peace. That same tension finds its way into scripture. I love the passage in Isaiah Chapter 2 where we read:

*He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore.*

A beautiful vision of the future where there is no need for weapons. You can also find those words in Micah.

Yet in Joel Chapter 3, another prophet speaking of The Day of The Lord to come we read,

*Proclaim this among the nations:
Prepare war,^[c]
stir up the warriors.
Let all the soldiers draw near,
let them come up.
¹⁰ Beat your plowshares into swords,
and your pruning hooks into spears;
let the weakling say, "I am a warrior."*

It would be a whole other sermon to discuss the context and timing of these passages. We are not sure which prophet came first and they may be writing to different specific situations, but one commentator says that Isaiah/Micah and Joel are actually offering two different and competing visions of how a peaceful future will be attained. Not so different from today perhaps.

Arguments on how to bring about peace can cause us to not be at peace with each other.

Jesus quotes Isaiah a fair bit but never quoted Joel. So perhaps that was his choice of the two. However even Jesus who said in The Beatitudes

"Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called The Children of God,"

also said in Matthew 10,

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Of course there is context for this comment as Jesus is explaining to His listeners what is involved in following Him. He must come first, which may cause a lack of peace in families. But it can cause us to second guess passages about peace. This man of peace we all follow was also known to turn the tables upside down in anger in the temple.

Peace can be elusive.

And when we speak of peace, we should know what it is we are speaking of. We may be speaking of different things. Peace in the world a lack of war, peace in our relationships, peace within.

Cultural peace, political peace, inner peace, and biblical peace may not always be the same thing. I asked folks online this week for a definition of peace and was given some wonderful answers.

I heard from folks in different states, different countries, folks of faith who found peace in Jesus, folks of no faith who found peace in other ways. I share that because I hope it is

obvious that peace means different things to different folks but it is important to many. Seeking peace is not exclusive to Christianity, but I hope we will find that the peace Jesus offers may be different. And we should pursue that peace.

Scripture, indeed, instructs us to pursue this peace.

Psalms 34:14 says,

“Depart from evil, and do good. Seek peace and pursue it.”

Again, in I Peter 3:10-11, we read,

“Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let them turn away from evil and do good let them seek peace and pursue it.”

Our objective in this series is to follow that biblical instruction. Even as we are praying and asking God for peace in all the places where we desire to see it, we are also going to think about what it means to pursue that Christlike peace.

Our passage today is usually read on Palm Sunday as we find Jesus entering Jerusalem with the disciples worshipping him and singing,

*“Blessed is the King
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!”*

Jesus is entering a town marked by political oppression, military occupation, social domination, economic exploitation. The religion of God’s people was accommodated if it did not question the values of their Roman overseers.

The words “Blessed is the King, who comes in the name of The Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” would not have meant the same thing to disciples, the crowds, the religious leaders, and their Roman occupiers. Their expectations and understanding of what that meant would have varied depending on their agenda. For some it was the fulfillment of prophecy, some expected a forceful overthrow of the Romans. Others may have seen it as an end to their way of life.

In John Chapter 14. 27 when promising His followers the Holy Spirit, Jesus says.

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.

In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson translates that same passage,

I'm leaving you well and whole. That's my parting gift to you. Peace. I don't leave you the way you're used to being left—feeling abandoned, bereft. So don't be upset. Don't be distraught.

The peace Jesus promised was not like any other kind of peace that the world had known.

Jesus challenged all the political, military, economic, social, and religious forces of the world by his acceptance of outcasts, compassion and healing for those tormented by physical and mental illness, and his teachings, particularly the Beatitudes. He offered an alternative view of the world in all of these things, finally lamenting in verse 42 of our passage,

“If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.”

Jesus did not come as one who would overpower or overthrow the dominant powers of the culture by force. Instead, Jesus taught a different kind of peace than the world taught. It included loving our enemies, forgiveness, welcoming outcasts, healing diseases and illnesses, feeding the hungry, and the power of love to transform our lives and our culture. These are some of the things that make for Jesus' peace.

I think one of the reasons that peace is so elusive is that the peace we often seek only exists when things are going well for us. It revolves around how well things are in our life. It is temporary and it is fickle and cannot be trusted. It depends on other people treating you well, it depends on earthly things. It is unstable.

The peace that Jesus gives is steady and stable, as opposed to being anchored in other people or to the things of this world, the peace of Jesus is anchored in the promises of God.

We read in Isaiah 48:18 in the NIV translation,

*If only you had paid attention to my commands,
your peace would have been like a river,
your well-being like the waves of the sea.*

And in Psalm 119:165 we read,

*Great peace have those who love your law;
nothing can make them stumble.*

When we root our lives in following the commandments and teachings of God, the peace we speak of becomes increasingly part of our lives. When we love our enemies, when we forgive, when we welcome the outcast, feed the hungry, when we bring healing, we increasingly experience that peace.

It would seem that the peace of Jesus is rooted in putting others before ourselves. Let's take a moment with that thought. The peace of Jesus is rooted in putting others before ourselves. And it is rooted in the knowledge that those who follow, and trust Jesus are loved by God and that love and grace are secure.

This peace is filled with faith and rest and certainty. Our goal is to experience that peace in all circumstances. This peace is ours in times of joy and in times of struggle.

So, what does this all mean for us? Jesus calls us to open our eyes, minds, and hearts to a different vision of peace and to be peacemakers within our own lives, our own churches, communities, and world.

I mentioned earlier that I had asked online for definitions of peace. There were many written beautifully about calmness, nature, the closeness of Jesus' presence, accepting what we cannot change and what we have, knowing things are as they should be, knowing we have done our best.

One friend who was the Catholic youth leader in the small town in Ohio I lived in said this,

“Being able to sleep at night without the hamster running the Wheel of Worry in my brain.”

That struck a chord with me. It is a thought I am sure almost all of us can relate to.

Over the next few weeks with this series, we will explore various ways we are called to be peacemakers. We will look at ways that we can work at slowing that hamster down for ourselves and others and perhaps more importantly to learn that even when the hamster is running crazy, the peace of Christ is still ours and is a place for us to find comfort. I hope you will join us for the journey.