

Rev. Dr. Chris Montovino  
Psalm 46; Mark 4:35-41; James 3:17-18  
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## Peace

We have just returned from Pensacola, Florida where we were celebrating our son's graduation from Naval Flight Officer School. We are very proud of him and his accomplishments. And are delighted to welcome Emma Bolton, his girlfriend who is here with us from Pensacola. This is her first visit to the Pacific Northwest, so let's make a good impact on her. We want her to want come back.

I appreciated your prayers while we were away because as we flew out last Wednesday Hurricane Helene was picking up steam in the Gulf of Mexico and barreling toward the Florida Gulf Coast. Hurricanes are notoriously unpredictable and could turn in an instant. We were very fortunate, that Helene missed Pensacola entirely though just several hours to the east people's homes were impacted from the massive storm surge. Emma's brother included.

This week, we've all seen the aftermath of the storm in places like Asheville, North Carolina, where one doesn't typically hear of hurricane impacts. It's all so heartbreaking. Regardless of one thinks about climate change, we cannot argue against the fact that storms are getting more severe, more often, and more deadly.

Which is why I think talking about our next fruit of the spirit is so timely. Peace. I'll be reading from several texts this morning. First from Psalm 46, then from Mark 4:35-41, and finally from James 3:17-18.

### Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.

2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way  
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,

3 though its waters roar and foam  
and the mountains quake with their surging.

4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

5 God is within her, she will not fall;  
God will help her at break of day.

6 Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;  
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

7 The Lord Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

8 Come and see what the Lord has done,  
the desolations he has brought on the earth.

9 He makes wars cease  
to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the shields with fire.

10 He says, “Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth.”

11 The Lord Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

#### Mark 4:35-41

**35** That day when evening came, [Jesus] said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” **36** Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. **37** A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. **38** Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

**39** He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

**40** He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

**41** They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

#### James 3:17-18

**17** But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. **18** Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

The 2024 results of the American Psychiatric Association's annual mental health poll show that U.S. adults are feeling increasingly more anxious. 43% say they feel more anxious than they did the previous year, up from 37% in 2023 and 32% in 2022.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that the total percentage of adults who experienced any anxiety symptoms in the past 2 weeks decreased with age, from 19.5% among adults aged 18–29, 16.6% among adults

aged 30–44, 15.2% among adults aged 45–64, to 11.2% among adults aged 65 and over.

In a nutshell, what this is showing us is that Americans are becoming more anxious than ever at younger and younger ages.

I am curious this morning what is making you feel anxious today?

The Apostle Paul says, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.”<sup>1</sup> So clearly God wants us to be more peaceful, whereas the world and the problems within it makes us more anxious.

So this morning, what I’d like to do is consider the following questions: What does the Bible says about peace? What does Jesus say about it? What often robs us of peace? What can we do to have more of it? And finally what should be markers if we are to be peacemakers in our world?

The scriptures that we just heard talk about peace. Peace amidst “trouble.” The Hebrew word for trouble comes from the root *tsarah* which could mean trouble from an adversary, adversity, affliction, anguish, distress, or tribulation. Trouble is an emotional response to any threat where internal or external.

The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom* and means an “all-round wellbeing, freedom from fear and want, and contentment in relationship with God, others, and creation.

As in this story with Jesus and his disciples, peace is God’s gift to his people and God’s promise within the storm of life - when love, justice, truth, and peace have a group hug, and heaven and earth are in harmony.”<sup>2</sup> Notice that these men in the boat were expert fishermen, people who were used to storms on the Sea of Galilee and yet they were also prone to fear, anxiety and worry?

The Greek word for peace is *eirene* and means “more than living a life with no conflict or being quiet, still, and at rest. It is used for the calmness that a nation or city enjoys when it has a caring, competent, and secure leader.”<sup>3</sup> This is what we hear in Psalm 46 when the psalmist proclaims “God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble.” *Tsarah*.

The Bible talks about being at peace with God and that God initiated that peace with us through his son Jesus Christ who is our peace. Though we were the offender, God reached out and offered us his hand of peace to us.

The Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Romans wrote, “Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

<sup>2</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 55.

<sup>3</sup> Trask and Goodall, *The Fruit of the Spirit*, 42.

Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into his grace in which we now stand."<sup>4</sup>

To the Ephesians he wrote, "For Jesus himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in him one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."<sup>5</sup>

This seems to imply that if we have Jesus in our lives, then God's peace is there for us. But if we don't, then we won't.

I believe that the current war in the Middle East is a great example of that. We see two legalistic religious cultures driven by warring regulations that demand an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. In other words, "You bomb my people. We'll bomb yours more." And it never ends. My friends, Jesus is the only one can get them off this downwardly self destructive path of retribution.

When we have peace with God, we can then have peace with one another which is our duty as followers of Christ. To the Colossians Paul wrote, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts."<sup>6</sup> And likewise he admonished the Romans, "Make every effort to do what leads to peace."<sup>7</sup>

Author Christopher Wright in his book, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit* wrote, "God calls us to live in peace with one another, as a way of 'living out' the transforming power of the cross in our own practical lives."<sup>8</sup>

The Apostle Paul often opened his letters with "Grace and peace." Somehow they go hand in hand. You can't have one without the other.

But what does Jesus say about peace? In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear...If God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will not he much more clothe you, O you of little faith...But seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 5:1-2

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 2:11-18

<sup>6</sup> Colossians 3:15-16

<sup>7</sup> Romans 14:19

<sup>8</sup> Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit*, 60.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 6:25-34

To his disciples on the eve of his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus said, “Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. I don’t give as the world gives, so do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”<sup>10</sup>

He continued, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”<sup>11</sup>

Jesus invites us to pay close attention to his words as one who was in close community with God the Father and to remember how God has taken care of us in the past.

But that leads us to ask what then robs us of peace?

Sin robs us of internal peace. If we aren’t living in a way that God intends, then we will be troubled in our spirits until we make a change.

The Apostle Paul tells us that our “Struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”<sup>12</sup>

We have an enemy in Satan, the Devil, who tries to steal our peace with worry, anxiety, and fear.

The cares of the world can also rob us of our peace. These are material, physical, and temporal things, like food, clothing, and treasures.

Some years ago, I would pay close attention to the stock market each day. And my day seemed to rise and fall based on what the stock market was doing. I found that it consumed too much of my attention, so I stopped checking it regularly.

More recently, I felt that my social media habits were also getting out of hand. Looking at other people’s posts or comments about my posts became the first and last thing I did in my day. It wasn’t making me any more connected to these folks or happy. So I felt the Spirit inviting me to ween myself from Instagram and Facebook. I even deleted both apps from my phone. Now I only allow myself access occasionally through my laptop. And not continual feeds from my phone.

Another thing that can rob us of our peace is too much political news. Notice how certain candidates fuel our fears and insecurities in order to manipulate a vote for them. Fear breeds viewership. Viewership increases ratings. Increased ratings yields higher advertising profits. So the news channels have a vested interest in keeping us under their bondage of fear.

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<sup>10</sup> John 14:27

<sup>11</sup> John 16:33

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 6:12

To come even closer to home, our peace should not be not reliant upon who wins the White House in November. Holocaust survivor and author, <sup>13</sup>Corrie ten Boom said, “Worry is a cycle of inefficient thoughts whirling around a center of fear...Worry doesn’t empty tomorrow of it’s sorrow; it empties today of it strength.” Listen to the candidates and pay attention to who stops the fear of the nation. I guarantee, the sun does not rise and fall upon their command.

Our need for control can also rob us of peace. How much of life is really in our control? Not much of it. So the more we can let go, and let God, the more peace we will have. On the contrary, the more we try to exert control and pressure on others, the less peace we will have.

And finally other people can be peace killers too. We all want to be around peaceful people. Anxious and worrisome people, we do not. That is why one the greatest gifts we can give people in troubling moments is a non anxious presence. Like how we saw Jesus in the boat with his disciples during the storm. He was not anxious about the storm because he knew that he had it within his capability. And he calmed the storm.

What can we do to have more of it?

You don’t tell a worrisome, anxious, or fearful person, not to be those things. And we can’t just pull ourselves up by our bootstraps to become more peaceful people. But there are things we can do to fuel a more peaceful heart.

The first is to acknowledge that peace is a fruit of the Spirit. It grows within and from us as we yield ourselves to power and control of the Holy Spirit. And fruit takes time to grow. So let’s give ourselves grace as we become more and more peaceful people.

Another thing we must do is stay connected to the right vine. Jesus said, “I am vine and you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in them, they will bear much fruit.”<sup>14</sup> As we remain connected to Jesus, his life source flows through us and produces fruit in keeping with his character.

We can pray and trust that God will take care of us like a good father. That was the advantage the Jesus had over his disciples in our story today. Jesus knew that he could trust his Father in every situation. The storm wasn’t going to kill them. In fact, Jesus spoke to the storm and it let up. If we want to experience God’s peace in all of life’s challenges, we must learn to trust God.”

Reminds me of Ted Buck’s sermon last week as he was facing a quintuple heart bypass surgery. And that bracelet he wore into surgery that said, “God’s got this.”

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<sup>13</sup> Corrie ten Boom as quoted by Trask and Goodall in *The Fruit of the Spirit*, 47.

<sup>14</sup> John 15:5

We can rejoice and be thankful to God for the many good things happening in and around our lives. Paul imprisoned in Rome wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”<sup>15</sup> It’s amazing how when we focus on the good things that God has done for us in the past, that our worries and concerns about today, melt away.

We can focus on helping or serving others. Just taking our attentions off ourselves for a change helps to put our troubles into perspective.

We can focus on the treasures from above and not on the treasures of this world.

And finally what should be the markers if we are to be peacemakers in our world?

Peacemakers have both an inner and outer peace. We extend peace to one another. We are to be fountains of peace. God’s peace pours out from us, even amidst very difficult circumstances.

Peacemakers accept one another, especially in this season of polemic politics. We don’t have to agree with one another, but as Christ followers we are called to love, accept, and avoid quarreling with one another over differences of opinions.

Authors Trask and Goodall in *The Fruit of the Spirit* wrote, “When the fruit of the peace is produced within us by the Holy Spirit, we can live life to the fullest in harmony and tranquility in spite of our circumstances. As we learn to depend on the Holy Spirit and understand that [the Spirit] will be with us in every situation, we will be more at rest and anxiety will be further away.”<sup>16</sup>

The "peacemakers," therefore, are not simply those who bring peace between two conflicting parties, but those actively at work making peace, bringing about wholeness and well-being among the alienated.”<sup>17</sup> “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons and daughters of God.”<sup>18</sup>

I will close with a story behind a much loved song that maybe familiar but worth repeating.

Horatio Spafford was a Presbyterian layman and successful lawyer in Chicago, but one who was also acquainted with sorrow. In 1871, his young son

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<sup>15</sup> Philippians 4:4-9

<sup>16</sup> Thomas E. Trask and Wayde I. Goodall, *The Fruit of the Spirit, Becoming the Person God Wants You to Be* (Nashville, TN: Emanate Books, 2000, 43.

<sup>17</sup> Robert A. Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (W Publishing Group, 1991)

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 5:9

died of pneumonia. Later that year, much of their real estate business was lost in the Great Chicago Fire.

Just two years later, Horatio and his wife Anna planned a vacation to Europe aboard a French ocean liner. Business matters delayed Horatio's departure, but Anna and their four daughters went on ahead. However, enroute their vessel collided with another ship and sunk with most of the passengers still on board. Anna alone was rescued from the waters. All four of their daughters died.

The story goes that as Horatio hurried to meet his wife in Cardiff, Wales, the ship he was on transited over the spot believed to be where his daughters had died previously. He wrote a poem which later was translated into a song.

“When peace, like a river, attendedth my way.

When sorrows like sea billows roll.

Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say.

It is well. It is well with my soul.”

My friends this is not a kind of peace that we can manufacture ourselves. It is a peace that comes from the fruit of Jesus' Holy Spirit as we yield our lives to him.

So may we remain connected to Jesus and his peace which goes beyond all human understanding might be evident in our lives. May this peace flow onto others like a fountain. And may we, like Horatio Spafford say, “Whatever our lot ...personally or as a country...It is well, It is well with our soul!”

Amen.