

December 5, 2021

"Peace Be With You"

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Selected verses on "Peace"

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I was driving down the road the other day and saw an old bumper sticker that brought a big smile to my face. You've probably all seen it. It reads, "No Jesus, no peace." That's the letters N O followed by the word Jesus, and the letters N O followed by the word peace. Then the next line reads, "Know Jesus, know peace." Only this time the letters are K N O W. And so it is, "No Jesus, no peace, know Jesus, know peace." And of course I find that sticker particularly meaningful on this second Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of Peace.

Why? Well, because many of you have told me time and time again, that you don't watch the news on television anymore. The anger and hate and violence have gotten the best of you. All the conflict and unhappiness you see just takes too much of a toll on you mentally. So you, and admittedly I, would rather just close our eyes to all of what's happening out there in the world. Yet when we hear of something like the Kenosha parade incident where over fifty people were injured or killed, or when we hear about that fifteen year old boy from Michigan who went on a shooting rampage at his school this week, or when we do try to make sense as to what's happening in this warring and dysfunctional world, the answer becomes clearly obvious. No Jesus, no peace.

And it's not just what's happening out there. Even within our own lives and homes and communities there are issues that create dissension and a lack of peace. Injustices, prejudices, marital conflicts, family problems, addictions, social and political differences, and more. Here, too, the answer is evident in so many of these cases. No Jesus, no peace.

So why is it then that the peace we so desperately desire has become so elusive? Well, truth be told, the search for peace has been going on since the beginning of time when Adam and Eve brought conflict between themselves and God. A conflict that still exists today. Because just think, so many of our priorities and beliefs are misguided or mixed up. They are in conflict with God's tenants and teachings. For instance, we heard today what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the peacemakers." And yet we live in a society that seems to applaud violence and conflict. Just look at all the movies and video games with graphic scenes of killing or destruction, and we watch them under the guise of "entertainment." Think of how this affects our impressionable young people. I vividly remember a mother telling me after the twin towers collapsed in New York that her son saw the news reports and pictures of the planes flying into the buildings, and his first reaction was, "That was cool!"

Obviously, he had no idea of the loss of life and the cost of what happened. That was twenty years ago! And things haven't got any better, have they?

And we too hold to many more beliefs that are in conflict with God. Spiritual author Beatrice Bruteau lists some of these beliefs. Things like, “Money, beauty and power are necessary for happiness. I am identified by what I look like and my possessions. My well-being is more important than yours. The world is here for us to exploit. No one should be trusted. There have to be winners and losers in this life. They hurt me, so I have to get even. I can't feel good about myself unless I'm better than somebody. Some people are just supposed to dominate other people.” We all have integrated these and other beliefs like them into our own thinking in one way or another, and yet they are so in conflict with what Jesus taught. Listen to what he says: “You are the light of the world, so let your light shine so that others may see your goodness. You shall love your enemies and pray for them. Forgive others their trespasses, and you will be forgiven. Do not store up yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Do not worry about your life. Do not judge. Do to others as you would have them do to you... for this is the law.” For this is the law!

Can you imagine for a moment a world, a community, where those words of Jesus were actually lived out? Instead, we struggle mightily. It's that conflict between wanting to live life our way verses living life God's way. And the only way to have the peace we're looking for, is for us to give up the struggle. In fact Jesus basically begins his ministry by telling us that. Remember when he chose his first disciples, Simon and Andrew. He said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Think about what that simple statement, “Follow me” conveys. “Follow me”... become an imitator of me, walk in my path. That's what a true follower of Jesus does – acts like Jesus. Then Jesus says, “I will make you fishers of men.” Now his statement, “I will make you,” is so counter to our culture's view that we are self-made individuals, that we define our own reality and way of being. And this thinking is probably the main reason why there is no peace in this world. Because we believe it's all about us. But no, Jesus puts this lie to bed. Because we learn from Jesus that it is God who ultimately acts and controls this world!¹

And we see this so clearly at Jesus' death and resurrection. Now it's interesting to note that on the night before he was going to be crucified, Jesus had some final words to say to his disciples. He said, “My 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.” Then a little later he tells them, “I have said

¹ Advent Gospel Reflections, Bishop Robert Barron

these things to you so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world.” Here was Jesus going into the most violent, tumultuous, frightening, painful time of his life, and what does he say... “My peace I give you.” And how does Jesus live out that peace? Not by fighting back, not by threatening, not by wielding his power or calling on a legion of angels. No, instead he prays, “Thy will be done.” And then he heals the ear of one who came to arrest him, he forgives those who crucified him, he assures a convicted criminal of a place in heaven with him, he made sure his mother was cared for, and he died with the calm assurance that his mission here on earth was fulfilled – “it is finished.”

And then God proved just who does control the world when Jesus rose triumphantly from the grave, defeating the very worst of evil. And, after his resurrection, can you guess what Jesus’ very first words to his disciples were? “Peace be with you.” And he looked at them and said it again, “Peace be with you.” This is the peace we find in knowing Jesus. It is a feeling of wholeness, of well-being, of calmness, even when the world around us is chaos. And we can only have that kind of peace when we get rid of the conflict, by giving up control. By living the way God wants us to live. Because truly, if rebellion and sin were ended, and we did, in fact, live that wonderful way Jesus taught, there would be peace in our hearts, peace in our homes, peace in our world. And so let us this Advent season, try to be more faithful followers, imitators of Jesus Christ. Let us “Know Jesus, and know peace.” Yes, know Jesus, and know peace. Amen.