

December 10, 2017

*"Peace of Mind"*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Selected verses

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Hasn't our Introit the past two weeks been wonderful – the french horn, the kids, the choir singing a wonderful rendition of one of my favorite songs, "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord." Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord. That song, so appropriate for Advent, is from the great 70's Broadway play, *Godspell*. Some of you younger folks may not know of it, but it's a musical based on St. Matthew's gospel. The performers are a group of "hippies", and without naming names, I know some of you can definitely relate to that! Well, there was a revival of the play some five years ago that I was lucky enough to attend. The show was at the Circle in the Square Theatre in New York, which is a theater in the round. So there's no curtain, and the cast members enter and leave the stage through the various aisles, right next to the audience. It was exactly 8:00 pm and we were expecting the show to start any minute, when I noticed a woman in a business suit walking down the aisle toward, I surmised, her seat. She was talking rather loudly on her cell phone and I thought to myself, how rude. But then she stepped right onto the stage. And the same thing was occurring all over the theater. There were two guys walking down another aisle, loudly joking and laughing, and then they stepped onto the stage. And this continued until all fourteen cast members were on stage. All of them going this way and that way, causing much commotion and confusion. The businesswoman walking about, negotiating a deal on her phone. Others sitting together in a small circle acting like they were at a gambling table. Some were drinking, some were angry and fighting, pushing and shoving, everyone moving noisily about, everyone trying to shout down one another, to best one another, as they went about their lives. Can you get the idea of what they were portraying? You see, all that disruption - it's a commentary on our lives... the chaos, the busyness, the frenzy, the sinfulness, the way we hurt one another, and especially, especially, the lack of peace in our lives.

You know, so often when we think of peace, we think of it as the opposite of war. And how ironic it is that we "fight for peace." As General Omar Bradley, a very famous five-star general who served in WWII, once said "Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing, than we know about living. We have grasped the mystery of the atom, but we have rejected the Sermon on the Mount." And, on this second Sunday in Advent, with all that's going on in the world around us, in North Korea, Jerusalem, and so many more places – how befitting it is that our theme is 'peace.' Now, I'm sure all of us remember the Sermon on the Mount,

especially that part where Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." And yet, war seems to be a never-ending pastime of humankind. Let me reel off just some of the wars that have occurred just in our collective lifetimes. World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the War in Afghanistan, and the War on Terror. There have also been lesser conflicts too numerous to mention like those in Ireland, Somalia, Bosnia, Darfur, the Congo, Myanmar, Yemen - like I said, many more too numerous to mention. Unfortunately, war and threat of war, is a constant – fought over such things as tyranny, wealth, land, and yes, even religion. Songwriter Judy Collins once sung of war as a condition where, "Every holy promise has been broken." Let the concept of a "holy promise" resonate for a moment in your minds. What a powerful way of describing what God wants for all his children... peace, love, joy, justice, equality. Now imagine us breaking that holy promise. Then she goes on to sing the question, "Do you dream of peace?" Do you dream of peace? Well, I think I can answer that question for all of us – yes. We all dream of peace. In fact, we are here today worshipping Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. And we desperately want those words of the angel to come true: "Peace on earth, goodwill toward men."

But the sad fact is that war between the nations is only a small part of humankind's chaos and conflict. For what about the war between the races? What about the war on drugs we see that's apparently destroying a generation – even right here in Falmouth? What about perhaps the worst war of all, because I think the anxiety, depression and emotional scars that result from this war serve as the catalyst for many, if not all those other wars. And that is the war being fought sometimes in our very own homes. I'm sure we all want the love and security of the family unit, yet sometimes we don't do a very good job in keeping the peace in this area. Let's be honest for a moment – are you now, or have you ever been, the antagonist on the front line in the war I just mentioned. Because I'm afraid we've all been guilty of causing discord at times. We've intentionally used our words to lash out, make insensitive or even derogatory comments toward someone we love, leaving them hurt and resentful. We've ignored or dismissed the feelings or opinions of others, leaving them feeling belittled. And our words and actions have a domino effect. I get upset with you, then you get angry with the person at the cash register, who then goes home and takes it out on her kids, who then have behavioral problems in school the next day, and....well, you see where I'm going with this. We end up with that opening scene from *Godspell* again. Regretfully, when we look at the lack of peace in the world, we have to come to terms with the fact that we're probably partly responsible for its absence. So with this realization, is there hope that we can be women or men of peace? Or is ultimate peace just an illusion?

There's a story about a young man, full of exuberant fancy, who took upon himself the task of cataloging all the acknowledged “goods things” in life. As a rich person might tabulate a list of the assets he owns, this young man set down an inventory of earthly desirables, such as: health, love, beauty, talent, power, riches, and fame. And he added these together with several minor ingredients of which he considered to be man’s perfect portion. When he completed his inventory, he showed it to a wise mentor who had been his spiritual model. “Perhaps I was trying to impress him with my precocious wisdom and universality of my interests,” he said. “Anyway, I handed him the list and said confidently, ‘this is the sum of all mortal goods. Could a man possess them all, he would be like a god’. In the corner of my friend’s old eyes though, I saw the wrinkles of amusement gathering in a patient net. ‘An excellent list,’ he said, pondering it thoughtfully. ‘Well processed in content and set down in not unreasonable an order. But it appears, my young friend, that you have omitted the most important element of all. You have forgotten the one ingredient, lacking which, each possession becomes a hideous torment, and your list becomes an intolerable burden.’ And what, I asked, is that missing ingredient? With a stub of a pencil he crossed out my entire list. Then having demolished my adolescent dream in a single stroke, he wrote down these three words, *peace of mind*.” \* Peace of mind. Doesn’t that sound wonderful. Peace of mind!

In today’s scripture, we hear Jesus, who was sitting with his disciples on his final night on earth, say, “I give you peace, the kind of peace that only I can give.” In a world full of contradictions and troubles and pressures, Jesus is promising us the greatest peace of all, his peace. His peace which gives us that ultimate peace – *peace of mind*. The peace of mind that only comes about when we are at peace with God. As we heard Thomas Merton say today, "We are not at peace with others because we are not at peace with ourselves, and we are not at peace with ourselves because we are not at peace with God." Yes, only when we are in a right relationship with God can we know the peace that Jesus was talking about. As pastor and author A. T. Pierson wrote, “The peace of God is that calm which lies so deep within the praying, trusting soul (that it cannot) be reached by any external disturbances.” “The peace of God is that calm which lies so deep within the praying, trusting soul (that it cannot) be reached by any external disturbances.”

The “praying, trusting soul.” This is the description of someone who doesn’t let the people or things of this world cause anger, doubt, fear or division. Let me ask – does this describe you? When those external disturbances happen that causes you to be upset, what is your first reaction? To lash out? Or is

it to go to God? To pray for calm, for direction and for help? When life isn't going the way you want, what, perhaps choice words do you say? Do you say, "Thy will be done," trusting that God is at work in your life, even in those difficult times. Because it's only by coming to God in prayer and with trust can we be at peace with God, and have that peace of mind we so desperately want.

Peace of mind. You see, with Christ in our hearts and minds, there will be joy in our character. With joy in our character, there will be harmony in the home. With harmony in the home, there will be unity in the nation. With unity in the nation, there might even be peace in the world.

\*J. Liebman, "*Peace of Mind*"