

PEACE, Psalm 65:1-8
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INTRODUCTION

I had a great week. I spent the whole week, while preparing this message, reading the Bible and books and famous quotes all about peace. What a great way to focus! In case you weren't able to be here last week, we are looking at Jude 2 these first four weeks in July. There are three separate hopes in the salutation- the greeting that opens the letter. They are translated "mercy, peace and love" with the qualifier/quantifier "in abundance". May they be yours! I love this greeting. Maybe I'll start beginning all my conversations and letters this way: "May mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance!" Isn't that a wonderful thing to want for others (and for ourselves)?

But what do those words mean? We use them every Sunday. They are BIG broad terms. How do we get them; how do we give them? Last week, mercy: to love deeply, to be compassionate, to show tender affection. This week- peace.

DEFINING

Peace is defined as a treaty to cease hostility the absence of war, or the absence of mental stress, it's having harmonious relations. Like the Hungry Caterpillar says in the children's book: "That's not big enough!" It's not full enough to be the Biblical definition of peace!

My NIV Study Bible describes peace as "Not just the absence of conflict but safety, wholeness, completeness and well-being in *all* relationships of life. It is God's blessing for his people and comes as a gift from God, from Jesus and from the Holy Spirit."

In Hebrew the word is *shalom*: To be complete, sound, having positive welfare, safety, healthy, free from fault, finished. In Psalm 65 the word in verse one: "to you shall vows be *performed*" is "fulfilled" or shalom in Hebrew. Shalom is not translatable by the one word of peace, but is used a lot in the Old Testament.

In Greek the word for peace is *eirene*, and is like the word shalom in Hebrew. It's the whole package of goodness. Jude 2 says "may mercy, plus wholeness, completeness and wellness in all aspects of your life, and love be yours, in abundance". Peace is one of those words we understand better when we examine the negative or lack of peace. We know when things *aren't* peaceful in our lives or in our world.

Thomas Merton, a monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani, in Kentucky, and is known for authoring more than 70 books, mostly on spirituality, social justice, wrote this:

"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."

GETTING

How do we get that "peaceful easy feeling"? Because of the world's chaos through sin, peace comes only as God's gift. The hope expressed when the people waited for the Messiah, was an age of peace, the coming of the Prince of Peace, but a leader/political prince. In Christ peace has come, but not the kind of peace brought by power, but of spiritual and emotional wholeness. And Jesus' disciples are called to be the messengers of peace.

How do we get peace? Real peace, the holistic peace that surpasses our understanding? The kind of peace that keeps us sane when we are in crisis? The kind of peace that we are supposed to be the messengers of? For a follower of Jesus the Christ we can live in that kind of peace. The Holy Spirit brings us peace above that of the world we live in.

Jesus said it this way: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I don't give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid" John 14:27.

This verse means so much to me. I am processing the grief of losing my Mom early in May, and I promise you won't hear about my Mom every week, but there is no way I can preach this sermon without this verse or this story.

It was 1970. The Viet Nam War continued to drag on. There were peace symbols decorating everything. Everyone, young and old knew that the V for victory had transformed into a peace symbol. "Peace, man!" And we sang: "All we are saying is give peace a chance."

But at my parents' home the anxiety was not about the war, but with my father's health. Somewhere along the way they heard a message of peace, and the peace was not from the world, but from God. They came to understand that only God could give them peace as they struggled with whether or not to go ahead with risky heart surgery for my dad.

There's an unfunny joke about how surgeons think about their work. "The surgery was a success, unfortunately the patient died." We got a great report after the surgery on my dad. Unfortunately, his heart was not strong, and he was overwhelmed by an infection. He died two days after the surgery. My Mom became a widow at age 48.

But, on their tombstone in a heart, where it usually says "beloved spouse" or "together forever", my parents' stone reads "St. John 14:27". I always knew the verse and that it said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I don't give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid". I used the illustration in a paper during seminary and the professor asked the obvious question: "WHY?" So, I asked my mom just a few years ago why *that* verse. And she said "the world was running around saying "peace", but it wasn't real peace. Only God gives real peace. I knew that God would help me".

The Bible is pretty clear about that. Consider these:

- Psalm 29:11: "The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace."
- Jeremiah 33:6-8: "I will bring health and healing ... to my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity ... and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me."
- Micah 5: 4-5: God's people "will live securely for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace."
- Romans 5:1: "We have peace with God through Christ".

- Phil 4:7: “The peace of God transcends all understanding.”

And many more are available if you have a Bible with a concordance. It's peaceful to read the many verses that talk about peace.

Rob Bell, in his book: “Love Wins”, which I'm encouraging us to read and discuss later this summer, says this: “Jesus invites us, in this life, in this broken, beautiful world, to experience the life of heaven now. He insisted over and over that God's peace, joy and love are currently available to us, exactly as we are” (p. 62). Peace comes to us as a gift, when we trust that God cares about our lives.

GIVING

How do we give peace to others? After we show mercy, we are to promote peace. When we communicate-really listening and understanding we bring peace. Christianity requires working so that all can have peace. It means looking for the best in others, and finding a way to help. We don't promote peace by sitting in our church. We need to get up and go out.

When accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, President Barack Obama said this: “peace is not merely the absence of visible conflict. Only a just peace based on the inherent rights and dignity of every individual can truly be lasting.” ... “For true peace is not just freedom from fear, but freedom from want.”

So, how can we promote peace? How do we make this world a better, more fulfilled, complete place with people having a sense of well-being, free from fear and need? I decided to make us a list, so I googled “101 ways to make the world more peaceful”. I found a nice list. But then I thought: “Umm, this is a sermon. What did Jesus teach?” So here's the list, not from the internet, but from the Gospel according to Mark. Here's what Jesus says to make this world better:

- Believe the good news
- Follow me
- Keep the commandments
- Celebrate the Sabbath
- Do good deeds
- Be joyful
- Consider carefully things you hear

Don't be afraid of storms
Have faith
Call people by name
Count your blessings
Remember God has been merciful to you
If you aren't welcome somewhere, just leave
Spend time in quiet places
Rest
Feed the hungry
Pay attention
Remember right from wrong
Be compassionate (merciful!)
Be realistic
Don't be ashamed of who you are
Remember everything is possible for God
Pray when you are in need
Serve others
Be kind to little children
Give whatever you can
Be at peace with each other
Keep your marriage strong
Trust like a child
Don't murder
Don't commit adultery
Don't steal
Don't lie or defraud others
Honor your parents
Give generously to the poor
Remember God's possibilities are endless
Don't worry about status
Serve
Respect holy places
Don't exploit others
Don't doubt God's abilities
Pray with faith
Forgive, if you want to be forgiven
Respect others
Pay your taxes and give to God, too
The most important rule is to love God
The next is to love your neighbor
Love yourself
Don't be a show off
Be kind to the less fortunate
Don't flaunt your good deeds
Give generously
Don't be alarmed about earthly struggles

Trust God to give you wise words
Stand up for your convictions
Pay attention to what's going on
Know that God is forever
Follow people who have been good examples
Celebrate the holidays
Remember Jesus' sacrifice and promises
Sing
Pray when you are afraid
Look for God's plan
Avoid temptation
Be non-violent
Keep your mouth shut
Speak truthfully
Know the scriptures
Be bold
Show respect
Trust what God has promised
Don't avoid the needy world
Go out there, knowing God is with you.

I had the opportunity to see the "Sound of Music" last night in Parchment. The final words of the play are from Isaiah 55. As you "Go out in joy and be led in peace"- follow Jesus' lead. God's peace, that sense of wholeness, well-being and security, will be evident in your life. And peace will be available in you to give to others. Amen.