

January 2, 2011 – Calvary Church of Pacific Palisades
There's No Place Like the Pilgrimage: Peace

The Silence Story

We seek this morning – at the dawn of a new year – the deepest, most profound – *and yet often the most elusive* of the spiritual benefits.

Peace.

Deep, internal, peace that passes understanding – the sign of restoration, of reconciliation between us and God.

From Philippians 4:4-9

***4** Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **6** Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

***8** Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. **9** Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

Here is the reality, my friends:

We were lovingly created;

we were woven together in the depths of the earth and all the days ordained for us were written in God's book before one of them came to pass;

we were bought with a price,

redeemed from slavery;

we were made in God's image and crowned, the Bible says, with glory and honor;

we were made co-heirs with Jesus and given "every spiritual blessing in Christ; though our sins were as scarlet He washed them whiter than snow;

as far as the east is from the west, so far as He removed our transgressions from us;

we've been given meaning in life – purpose; boundless opportunities to serve and to give.

We are permanently, lovingly accepted by the God of the ages – sealed by the Holy Spirit.

The great Son of Man, King of Heaven, BY whom and FOR whom the galaxies were made, lived a life for us, and died for us, and defeated death for us

The blessings of God – it seems – are never ending

And yet I ask you. Is your heart sometimes like mine, and like those of so many people I speak with? Divided? Untrusting? Anxious? Peaceless?

Do these songs of hope and joy sometimes ring hollow because life is real and *'I'm worried about the future and my neighbor is driving me crazy and my child is floundering and my parents are fighting and my boss doesn't understand me and my nest egg broke and no one invites me to their new year's party and where is the peace that God promised?'*

We do well to remember: this world is not our home. As the title of our message implies, we are on a pilgrimage. We are citizens of heaven and – as such – there will always be longing, and restlessness, and hunger. There will always be – for the follower of Christ – a desire for more of God, which creates within us the desire to pray; “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

The life of service and sacrifice is wild and adventurous. Comfort is certainly no place for the servant of Christ. But internal peace, the sign of a heart made right with God, is the important bedrock upon which to build this life of adventure.

But as we look out into the new year, we ponder what God has in store. Today I want to re-orient our minds – to seek the glory of God's name and in so doing to fill our hearts with peace. The peace that passes all understanding..

Not (as someone said) the marshmallow-y peace of childhood, from our Santa's wish lists - all sweet and fluffy but with no substance; but the sturdy peace of the Scriptures, the shalom – the 'wholeness' (which is where that word comes from) of the Old Testament peace.

The first words that the risen Christ uttered to his disciples, when appearing to them in the upper room – peace be with you;

The most oft-repeated command in the Scriptures? This may surprise you: Fear not.

Let us think together, momentarily, about all the circumstances that threaten our peace, that cause anxiety and fear, and see if you can identify with any of these, or perhaps add your own to this list:

-dissatisfaction with relationships, circumstances, resources

-worthlessness

-envy

-sin – and all of its annoying relatives, like shame, guilt, emptiness, and regret.

-uncertainty

-jealousy

-marginalization, or exclusion

-fear

**God first reveals, in our passage for today, that he knows our needs:

I. Our Needs

- a. an awareness of the here-ness of God (and the companionship that his presence provides (v5)
- b. a guard for our anxious hearts and minds (v7)

**God also makes some promises –

II. God's Promises

- a. that our lives will be touched by something that passes all understanding (v7) the peace of God – not simply inner tranquility and rest, but wholeness (v7)
- b. that God's peace will guard us and he will be our constant companion

**But we come to the heart of our message today. What does this passage mean to me, and how can I apply it to my life – to the glory of God's name.

III. Our Responsibility

- a. In our Relationships with God, to WORSHIP: rejoice in the Lord, always (v4);

"We cannot hope to enjoy the peace of God if we give less than the first place to him who is our peace."
- b. In our relationships with others, to let our GENTLENESS be evident to all (v5),

This might be the most prominent of the peace-stealers. This is the "I'm going to take this into my own hands now, Lord. As long as I work in this place or live next to these people or share a room with this person I will never have peace!" So I will sabotage and maneuver and manipulate – instead of letting my gentleness be evident to all.

And gentleness means this: the uncomplaining readiness to accept others as they are and to submit oneself to their demands.

- c. in circumstances to have no anxiety, but rather to PRAY that God will help (v6)
...
and THANK him for his provision (v6)
...
- d. in our thoughts to discipline our minds – to PONDER excellent and praiseworthy things, and to allow our ponderings to influence the way we live (v8)
- e. in our behavior, OBEDIENCE “what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do” (v9)

to yield to God’s will and to behave according to the manual.

Isaiah 26:3-4

- 3** You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.
- 4** Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.

An unexpected train ride to Fullerton

John 14:27

Jesus tells his followers, near the end of his life: **27** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”