

“THE ADVENT OF PEACE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

December 7, 2014, 10:30AM

Scripture Text: Philippians 4:6-7; Psalm 131

Introduction.

We take up the topic of peace this morning. There are many different kinds of peace.

Peace in nature means no howling Northeaster coming down the Frasier River valley.

Peace in Ferguson, Missouri means not protesters and rioters on the streets.

Peace in Iraq means no suicide bombs going off, no bursts from assault rifles.

Peace at work means no demanding bosses, no deadlines calling for attention, no piles to deal with or something broken that is holding everything else up.

Peace in the home means no babies crying or kids fighting or spouses grumbling.

Peace in our soul means no fear or anxiety, no doubt or guilt, no cloud of depression.

Last week we talked about the difference between conventional hope or worldly hope, like hoping something happens, and confident hope or Biblical hope.

Peace in the conventional sense usually means absence of struggle, war, fighting, chaos. Peace in the Bible is not absence of struggle, but presence of quiet, confident trust. In the words of Jesus this is a peace not like the world gives. In the words of Paul this is a peace that surpasses understanding which we want to talk about this morning.

Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. **7** And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Peace with God leads to the peace of God.

Before we can have the peace of God, we have to have peace with God. The world was made in perfect peace and harmony with God until sin disrupted everything and threw everything into turmoil. Sin and the fall are the cause of all wars and fighting and turmoil.

While we are in sin we are God's enemy, in a war where the only hope is the surrender of repentance. But when we repent the grace of God turns us from an enemy to a child.

Believing in Jesus is the key to unlocking peace with God.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The incarnation is the beginning of true peace with God. Jesus came into the world to bring God's peace, God's reconciliation and harmony, for our souls and for peoples and nations.

Salvation means we no longer having anything to fear from God, we have peace with God because we have peace from God purchased on the cross by the blood of Jesus.

There is only one safe harbor in the storms of life, and that is peace with God in Christ Jesus. No other peace is lasting. Outside of Christ there is no forgiveness of sins, and therefore no hope of reconciliation and peace with God.

Believing in Jesus is also the key to unlocking peace with each other.

Let's be a clear as we can. Without Jesus Christ there will be no true and lasting peace between nations, between races, between friends, between spouses.

Outside of Christ there is no forgiveness and without forgiveness there are wars, revenge, getting even, anger, bitterness, grudges; no peace or unity or harmony.

The reason there is so much strife and hatred and tension in our world is because there are so many hearts devoid of the peace of God and the peace of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

People want peace in our world, peace from wars, violence, racial tension, injustice, they want that blessing of God but they want it without God. That's like wanting wages without working or a harvest without plowing and planting. Without God and the Gospel of Jesus there is no true and lasting peace.

Once we have made peace with God, then we can enjoy and ***benefit*** from the peace of God.

Will guard your hearts and minds.

Isaiah 26:3 You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.

The peace of God is like a sentry standing guard keeping the world's turmoil and chaos out and keeping us in, keeping us from returning to temptation to sinful or anxious thoughts and desires.

It is as if God Himself takes up His post at the gates of our heart and mind, He positions Himself on the high wall and in the tower around our heart and mind.

When we make our requests known to God, when we cast all our cares and burdens on Him, when we surrender ourselves and our circumstances to His perfect will, then we rest on the inside and He stands guard around us.

The peace of God doesn't depend on anything in this world, on circumstances, on our expectations and desires, it is in Him and from Him and kept by Him.

Peace which surpasses all understanding.

This peace surpasses all worldly understanding. It resists human comprehension. It transcends human intellect, human analysis, human powers of reason. In fact it is really beyond our ability to imagine it.

Yet we can experience it, you can know it even when we can figure it out.

Salvation Army General John George Carpenter and his wife prayed for their sick daughter. Their prayer was simply "You can heal her if you will." After six weeks she died and they both said a strange and curious calm settled over their souls which they could only explain as the peace of God.

It doesn't make any earthly sense how we can have peace in the depth of despair, in the depth of poverty, in the depth of weakness or brokenness. A Christian can be in the most devastating, unbearable circumstance and experience a tranquility that comes only from a confident trust in the wisdom, love, power and sovereign goodness of God. Those who trust His perfect love will know His perfect peace.

This kind of peace can only be known through the Word and the Spirit, for it is spiritually discerned and spiritually received.

Psalm 131 as an illustration of this kind of peace which surpasses all understanding.

Psalm 131 is a little window into the heart of a person who has found the peace that passes understanding. Here is a picture of a person who has learned how to still his soul.

He is not consumed by the tyranny of the urgent, not stressed by noise and hurry, he's not fretting or wringing his hands. Anxiety isn't keeping him up at night. He is quiet inside.

How do you get to that place? And when you lose it how do you get it back?

Who wrote this Psalm? We know it was written by David. And what do we know about David?

First, we know that David's life was not perfect, not filled with just peace and calm. He was pursued by enemies, he was involved in wars and great conflicts. So we know that this peace is not about having an easy life where everything went his way. He experienced pressure, heartache, and serious problems.

Second, we know David was a man after God's own heart. David pursued God, David knew God. In other words, he learned peace by pursuing peace in a relationship with God. His made a conscious effort to calm and quiet his soul by seeking it in God.

In the last sentence of the Psalm David says we can have this same peace if we will hope in the Lord. He followed a simple two step method to have this peace.

Stop pursuing what you can't control

He stopped trying to find peace in all the wrong places. He stopped trying to control everything or fix everything.

We think we can have more peace if we can just get more organized or eliminate clutter in our lives or quiet the noise. Is it really too much to ask that the appliances keep working and the truck runs the way it should and that our bodies stay healthy? Is it too much to want life to run smoothly, to have just enough money to pay the bills and have a little extra for vacation? Is it too much just to have the world quiet down and settle down a bit? Is it too much to ask everyone to just get along?

David says he is not expecting such things, his heart is not lifted up with desires that are too much, his eyes are not fixed on himself, he is not proud or selfish or self-centered. He is not obsessing with things that are too difficult or impossible to control. He doesn't occupy himself with ambitions and schemes that are too great.

He recognizes that life is really beyond our control, even the small things. We can't control outcomes, we can't control other people or their reactions or attitudes, we can't control what works or doesn't work.

Someone wrote the opposite of this psalm, an anti-psalm (David Powlison):

Self, my heart is proud (I'm absorbed in myself),

and my eyes are haughty (I look down on other people),
and I chase after things too great and too difficult for me.
So of course I'm noisy and restless inside, it comes naturally,
like a hungry infant fussing on his mother's lap,
like a hungry infant, I'm restless with my demands and worries.
I scatter my hopes onto anything and everybody all the time.

What happens when we obsess about our health, or diet or exercise? It becomes this noise in our head, a nagging voice, with lots of guilt.

What happens when we obsess over what people think about us? It becomes this noise of manipulation and trying to figure out how to be more liked.

What happens when we obsess about our future, our business, our family? We feel anxiety, depression, sadness, guilt, failure.

Most of the noise in our souls is trying to control what we can't control. First, we try harder, then we get frustrated, then angry, then fearful and finally depressed or despairing.

Be still my soul and know the Lord is God

But, the psalmist says. But, I have calmed and quieted my soul.

He has gone through a ***weaning process***, weaning himself from the things that cause noise and distraction and inner turmoil. He describes it in a ***metaphor*** that any of you mothers who have nursed a baby can appreciate.

Before a baby is weaned, when he is hungry and placed on a mother's lap he starts fussing and getting agitated until he gets what he wants, that milk that means happiness and satisfaction and life to him.

That baby is the picture of adults who are frustrated or discontent because they aren't getting what they want or think they need.

But what happens when a baby is weaned onto solid food. He can be placed on his mother's lap and be the picture of quiet peace, contentment. No longer squirming and noisy and demanding.

David pictures the weaned child as a symbol of contentment, ease, rest, peace.

This is the picture David has of what happens when we are weaned from the world's ideas of what makes for peace and weaned to learn the peace that passes understanding, the peace that comes down from above.

It is a mark of spiritual weaning when we no longer look to the world for our pleasure or satisfaction and peace. It is a mark of spiritual weaning when we can let go of what we once thought was necessary

Psalm 131:3 O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.

Hope in God. Calming your soul is not easy, it resists it. In fact nothing but the grace of hope will bring peace.

Matthew 11:28-29 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Are we pursuing the things that make for anxiety, discontent and chaos or are we pursuing the things that make for peace?

Trust and hope from Him, in Him, through Him.

If you are not at peace in your soul, ask yourself what part of God's sovereignty and goodness are you not trusting?

We sang a very arresting verse before the sermon:

Still my soul be still And do not fear
Though winds of change may rage tomorrow
God is at your side No longer dread
The fires of unexpected sorrow
God You are my God And I will trust in You and not be shaken

We have this peace when we wean ourselves from introspection, from all comparison, envy, jealousy, coveting; from worldly ambitions, and by eating the solid food of hope, trust, faith, confidence in God.

We wean ourselves by knowing God is working in all situations and circumstances for His glory and the good of those who love Him and live for Him, so rest in Him.

We wean ourselves by knowing God is in heaven and He knows our needs better than we do, so rest in Him.

We wean ourselves by knowing Jesus can quiet any storm and any demon, the wind and the waves and the demons must obey Him.

Psalm 46:10 "Be still [or cease striving, cease hurrying, be still, be quiet] and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"

Be still and know the God is sovereign over all the world and all nations and His peace will triumph. Let this awesome reality quiet your soul. Let these eternal truths take hold and change our perspectives.

Read Psalm 131 again out loud, together.

Psalm 131:1-3 O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.
2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me.
3 O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.

Let us pray: Holy Father in just a few moments we are going to sing about trusting in you and finding as you promised perfect peace and rest. That's hard to come by these days and we ask you by your Spirit in us to wean us from all that makes us restless and fix our eyes and hearts on you, until we can say it is well with our souls and our souls are at rest within us. Hear and answer for we surely need it. For the sake of Jesus, we ask this is His name. Amen.