

"Whose peace? Yours or God's?" A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
June 16, 2019, Trinity Sunday
Romans 5:1-5

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

How many of you are familiar with the radio show 'Car Talk'? Tom and Ray, brothers, entertained people by answering car questions from callers for 35 years until 2012 when they decided to call it quits.

This morning, let's imagine a caller named Sue asks, "Is there a part of the car that manufactures still include in each new car, but we really don't need any more?" Do any of you wish to venture a guess?

Let's listen in on Tom and Ray's response to the question.

Tom: Great question, Sue! The "part" that comes to mind is the parking lights.

Ray: Right. In the old, old days, when my brother still had a few brain cells left, cars were not that common. So when you parked yours at the side of the road, you left your "parking lights" on. That way, when Ichabod Crane came whizzing by in his buggy he wouldn't smash into you.

Tom: But now that we all expect cars to be parked on every street, and we have reflectors to make them more visible, parking lights are hardly necessary (Click & Clack, "Auto Evolution," The Washington Post, May 8, 1998).

Why then do we still have parking lights on cars? Seems that manufactures haven't evolved to make the change to eliminate parking lights since they appear to have no practical use. They are a remnant of earlier times.

I sometimes wonder if the world views peace as a remnant of an earlier time. With wars and rumors of wars what has happened to peace. Friends get even with each other. When someone hits you, you strike back. Whatever happened to following in Jesus' footsteps? It seems that many people don't have the peace Paul writes about - peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peace in this world would certainly help to solve many of the world's problems! So what can we do to claim God's peace and use it to influence our part of the world? Perhaps through our peace, our behavior, we can help to solve the world's problems. This morning let's take a look how we can express God's peace in our lives.

Are you peaceful? Or do you have a friend that is peaceful, that you think is at peace? Great, if you do! Not too many people are truly peaceful. Not too many people express a non-anxious presence, using a common expression.

It seems that people are searching for peace – an inner peace. This has come home to me when I read the *LA Times*. At least once a week, there's an article in the paper featuring some new mindfulness fad for those seeking inner peace. The variety of ways are amazing that one can explore to '**get in touch with ones' self**' as it's called. A red tent experience, yoga with

goats or on horseback, cycling, forest bathing – the list goes on and on. For the *LA Times* to offer such extensive coverage of the latest fads – well, there must be a lot of interest out there.

Evidently, inner peace is not a thing of the past like parking lights! Why do so many people struggle with finding inner peace or peace of mind? Do mindfulness exercises or meditation lead a person to peace of mind?

I believe the hunger we see that drives these events is caused by people instinctively knowing they are not the people they want to be. As Christ-followers, we see the problem as knowing we are falling short of being the people God created us to be. As you have probably heard me say before, God created each of us with a God-shaped hole in our hearts. When we reject God for whatever reason, that hole in our hearts seeks other ways to be filled. No mindfulness event or fad can take God's place in our hearts. The peace we crave cannot be achieved through some kind of persistent psychological self-discipline like an athlete training for an event.

You've heard the saying: No God, no peace. Know God, know peace. True peace comes from God.

When you think about the hardships Paul endured to go to the ends of the earth to tell others about Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection, we may be amazed that Paul would talk about peace. But he does. That's because Paul knew that real peace of mind comes from having an intimate knowledge of God more than having an intimate knowledge of yourself.

In our scripture today, Paul lays out a lasting path to peace for you and me. That path? Peace that is the result of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Paul talks about peace with God as the foundation of our peace. Notice the preposition with. Paul writes: **Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.** When we have faith and trust in Jesus and what God has done through Jesus, then we have peace with God. It's that simple. God's grace, God forgiveness, has been given to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When I say God's forgiveness, I mean that through belief in Jesus, we have forgiveness of our sins – all of them. Your sins, your past, those terrible things that may keep you up at night – they are all forgiven and are no more. God doesn't remember them. They don't come back to God's mind, like things come back to our mind. Your slate has been wiped clean. You have been given a fresh start. Now that ought to give you peace and allow you to be a non-anxious presence because you have nothing to be anxious about!

Claim that peace and live in the Peace of God. Peace with God leads to the peace of God. God's peace leads to peace of mind because you've filled that God-shaped hole in your heart with God. At that point, you are free from anxiety and worry because God is there in your heart living with you through the Holy Spirit. We don't have to take a class to learn to be at peace. Our peace comes from faith because we know God is at work in us and caring for us. Yes, we can have peace even when we're experiencing challenging times. That is a peace, an inner peace, that stands out in our anxious world.

We can claim that peace through faith, through an intimate knowledge of God. That's how we can claim God's peace. Now, how do we use it to influence our part of the world?

Those who have this peace are attractive to others. Others want this same peace, this same non-anxious presence, this inner peace. Others see our peacefulness even when life gets hard. Those who have this peace don't react negatively when things don't go their way. They worry less. Yes, they may suffer, but they endure suffering with grace and a hope for the future. They are not faking it. They are actually living examples of God's peace and others can see that peace.

God's inner peace in our lives is not an end goal. What did Jesus tell his disciples when he sent them out to tell people the kingdom of God was near? He told them to greet others, especially where they were staying with 'Peace to this house.'

Peace, God's peace, is not something we keep to ourselves. It is to be shared with other. We have peace with God that leads us to have the peace of God with leads us to become peacemakers of God. We are to extend God's peace to others.

What does this peace look like? How do people of peace act peaceably? If we look further into Paul's letter to the Romans we find people of peace:

- show genuine love to others (v. 9). People who live peaceably hate evil and hold fast to what is good, serving one another in mutual affection and showing honor to one another.
- They are enthusiastic, serving the Lord with the fire of the Spirit (v. 10). People of peace are not the "frozen chosen" but are genuinely excited about serving and doing the work of the Lord.
- They have hope no matter the circumstance, being patient in suffering and fervent in prayer (v. 12).
- They contribute to the needs of others and show hospitality to strangers (v. 13).
- They are able to bless their persecutors instead of cursing them (v. 14).
- They are empathic, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep (v. 15). There is no jealousy, but a genuine hope for the well-being of another.
- They live as part of a community where they see everyone as equals and are humble about their own abilities (v. 16).
- And they don't seek revenge when wronged. Instead, they care for their enemies and let God handle the rest (vv. 19-21). Instead of overcoming evil with revenge and retaliation, they conquer evil with good to the point that their enemies are embarrassed. (Homiletics Online, Real Peace, Romans 5:1-5, 6/16/2019)

Peace is not passé. It's not out-of-date. Unlike parking lights, peace is quite useful in our world today.

Peace with God leads to the peace of God which leads to peacemaking in the power of God.

With this kind of peace, we can change the world!