

"The Peace of the Lord be With You." A message by Kevin Bowers
Cathedral City Communion Presbyterian Church
December 8th, 2019, the 2nd Sunday of Advent: Peace

Micah 5:4-5

And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And His people shall dwell secure, for He shall be great to the ends of the earth. And He will be their peace.

A few minutes ago, we participated in the ancient ritual of the "Passing of the Peace." When we pass the peace, we greet one another with the peace of Christ as common, forgiven sinners. We are forgiven, so we forgive. We reconcile tensions that may exist between us and our neighbor. We recognize our own shortcomings as someone else offers to us the peace of Christ. Probably the single most important experience in the passing of the peace is recognizing that the peace of Christ surpasses all understanding.

What is Peace and where does it come from?

Ephesians 2:14-21

¹⁴For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

When battles cease, when people are united, when reconciliation takes place, there is peace. When Paul penned these words, he clearly stated that we are no longer strangers and aliens but citizens in one household of God. The same is true today when we seek justice and reconciliation with our brothers and sisters of different races, religions, cultural backgrounds.

In short, our peace comes from Christ who reconciled us (all of us) to himself.

Why is peace important?

Having made peace with God, the congregation is now instructed to reconcile with each other. The order in which we pass the peace is important. As a group, we have collectively listened to and received a *call to confession*. The *call to confession* is a summons to humble ourselves before the Lord, invite the Holy Spirit to search our hearts, and then join together in a *prayer of confession*. Corporately, we are uniting ourselves not only with our local congregational members, but with believers all over the country who are participating in openly seeking the forgiveness of the Lord.

The liturgist goes on to read a statement of forgiveness: *God's Grace, Forgiveness*. "In Christ we are forgiven." Because we are forgiven, we can openly reconcile with our neighbor, brother, and congregational member and share the peace of the Lord with others.

The authority of peace through the Messiah

Why do we do it...pass the peace? What is the authority and validity of this ancient practice?

Micah 5:4-5

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The prophet Micah made it clear that the expected Messiah would stand as a good shepherd, guiding and ordering his flock. The Messiah would be ready to aid and defend. The Messiah will rule in all the power and glory as entrusted to Him by God. Micah goes on to reveal that God's children would sit, rest, and dwell in the peace of the Lord. God's children can find refuge in the peace of the Lord.

If you fast forward to the New Testament, the peace of the Lord is summoned over and over again as a tool invited to be used by God's people to share the Truth of the Lord.

Luke 24:36 says, as Jesus appears to his disciples: "While they were talking [about this,] Jesus said to them, 'peace be with you.'"

John 20:19, 26, again while Jesus was talking to his disciples: When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Paul opens each of his letters with the words: "Peace be with you."

I frequently hear statements like "church is too rigid," or "there are too many things I have to do," and even "it's really repetitious." I have to chuckle when the church is openly criticized for being traditional and rigid. Service organizations like Rotary, Elks, and the Lion's Club all have books of order in which the outlining of every element of the participant is delineated. At the end of these meetings, the groups are united through words and sayings that bring the individuals together in unity.

Have you ever read the terms and agreements statement on Facebook or Twitter? These are the most openly one-sided contracts on the planet! Basically, Facebook, Twitter and Google get all the rights and all the power. Unlike the many one-sided contracts in society, in the church, the passing of the peace acknowledges both division and acceptance; separation and unity. It reconciles both sides to each other offering unity and inclusion.

Like it or not, the ancient ritual of the passing of the peace is employed in weddings, funerals, service organizations, city functions and sports.

Weddings: "Speak now or forever hold your peace." It offers a chance of reconciliation for those in attendance to the bride and groom.

Funerals: "Death is not extinguishing a light; it is putting out the lamp because dawn has come." This speaks to the balance and reconciliation of life and death.

Rotary: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned? This speaks to unity and justice, concern for a brother, and integrity in decision making.

Sports: Post-game handshakes and high-fives are a time-honored tradition in many sports. After fighting a conquering battle to achieve victory, opposing teams approach each other from opposite directions and offer a simple gesture that brings an end to the battle, and offers a declaration of peace. The common practice of the post-game ritual reinforces the value of sportsmanship and a devotion to the resolution that all sides have come to terms.

The benefits of Passing the Peace

When we step toward our brother or sister to offer peace, our brother or sister steps toward us to offer peace. Tensions pass away. Disunity disappears. As we

forgive, we are forgiven. Christ, as prophesied brings unity and reconciliation; forgiveness and peace.

(Read as a paraphrase to tell a story: Actual scripture appears in parenthesis.)
He shall come forth and serve them (Luke 12:37). The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister (Matthew 20:28). As a Shepherd, he shall stand; to watch, to feed, to guard day and night – He shall stand (Isaiah 6:1-5). For to sit belongs to one judging; to stand, to one fighting. As abiding, not to pass from them for our Lord declares Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Matthew 28:20). To whom the Lord feeds, they lack nothing (Psalm 23:1). He, the Lord Jesus is our peace.

So, in this season of peace, may we allow the peace of Christ to flow out from special moments. May the peace that guides us to the Table of the Lord be the same peace that guides us to our lunch tables at home, our work areas, and friend's kitchen counters. May we recognize that Jesus extended his life to the point of his death so that we could have peace with humanity.

When we greet each other in Christian fellowship, may the peace of the Lord be with you!