

Whose Peace? Which Story?

[John 14:21-27; Philippians 2:1-11](#)

Strategic Theme: Becoming a Healing and Reconciling Church

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Worship at 9:15 and 11 a.m.

I invite you, if you have a Bible, to open it to the book of Philippians, chapter 2, where we'd like to consider some words from God to us, as a church today. Several weeks now ago, in anticipation of our ministry being here this week, I was asked to speak on the subject of "Peace and Reconciliation." Several weeks after that, prior to coming here, I was asked to give a title and a Bible text for what I might speak about. In response, I explained that it is difficult to do that because it is our tradition to come to the church and hear what you are saying; and then, in listening to that, respond with some word from God, from his Word. So our process is to seek God, to hear what he might say. And so, through all these many weeks now, in preparation of coming here, I have been praying that God would speak to me—that I might speak to you. As we came here this week, we were (and I was especially) praying for the Lord to speak to me. On Monday, seeing that it would be good to give you a title and text, I gave this text and title, not knowing then what I might speak right now. And through each day this week, I have been asking God to speak to me. As I came up these steps this morning, I was praying, "Lord, it would be a good time for you to tell me [laughter] what to say." And then, as I stood here, and the lights came on, God spoke with profound clarity: I heard him say, "Jim, you are unprepared." [laughter]

Christianity is a faith of hearing. We know from the Old Testament, that we are called, as believers, as Israel was: "Hear, O, Israel, the Lord your God is one. Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and strength." Christianity is a faith of hearing. We affirm in this church, with the Reformers, that God initiates a relationship with us. God is always prior. Salvation is by grace— grace alone — and not by works. Yet, we are called to work out that salvation that God puts in, and to do so "with fear and trembling." That is, faith requires action. Hearing assumes obedience. God chooses you and me— but we must respond.

How do we live our faith in the tension of waiting for God to speak... and yet acting on what we already know he has said? How do we live in such a way that we are guided by the Holy Spirit in all we do and say? To be a follower of Jesus means ordering our life, ordering our thoughts, our feelings, and our actions through a specific calling, a specific story: the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, whom we name as Lord. We are called to a specific way of life, guided by a unique story that stands in contrast to the world and all its values—in wisdom, turns upside down. I want to speak with you, in the brief moments we have this morning, about how God wants to bring you peace, and to change your mind. Will you pray with me? Father in heaven, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you. Would you get me out of the way... and any thought or distraction we may have brought into this sanctuary this morning? Remove any distraction that would keep us from hearing and responding to the grace and the peace of Jesus Christ—in whose name we pray. Amen.

Jesus says, "My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives." Each of us has come into this sanctuary this morning in search of quietness and rest; whether it's relief from the pressures of world affairs, our work in government or the marketplace; or simply peace, and rest, and clarity from broken relationships in our homes... our marriages... and our neighborhoods. Whatever our situation, we, all of us, this morning, come here seeking peace. All of us need peace; but there are two kinds of peace.

Jesus suggests to us there are two kinds of peace we may take from this place this morning. We come into this wonderful sanctuary, and we look at the stained glass windows, and hear the magnificent music... and we place ourselves under God's Word, and we sense some peace, some rest, some quietness. The beauty of this place and the architecture—all of this brings peace. But all of it is a peace that we leave behind when we go out through these doors. To be sure, all of us go out from here, and we pray for peace in our personal lives, and we pray for peace in the world. Particularly, in these days we pray for peace of Jerusalem. We pray for our President, our Cabinet and Congress, and world leaders right now working for peace in Jerusalem. We pray for them; we pray that God would use men and women to bring peace. But we do so through the eyes of Jesus who, as we recall, on that week before his crucifixion, in that triumphal entry into Jerusalem when all of his pilgrims are coming and laying boughs before him, as told in the Gospel of Luke: he comes up over the Mount of Olives. There, before his sight, the city of Jerusalem appears before him. And he looks out; and we're told in the Scripture, that Jesus begins to weep. He weeps because he knows that the city—this great city—cannot see the peace that comes before them. Luke tells us: Jesus says, "If you, even you, had recognized this day what would bring you peace; but now it is hidden from your eyes." Jesus asks us to consider whose peace we are coming to this place for... and whose peace will we leave with?

The peace of Jesus is not a feeling that we can control, nor a status we can negotiate; it is the gift of God that passes understanding. This is good news; for if peace is a person, in the person of Jesus, through the presence of his Holy Spirit, then that means when we leave this place, we can leave with Jesus. We can leave with peace in our hearts and in our minds, to face the world about us through all of its tribulations. We can say, with the great hymnwriter, "When peace like a river attendeth my way; when sorrows like sea billows roll— whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, 'It is well. It is well with my soul.'" The peace Jesus offers you this morning is the peace of the person of Jesus Christ. Peace comes to us as a person; but that person is revealed to us in the Gospel— in the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, who is Lord.

And in our text for the sermon this morning, from Philippians chapter 2, we are reminded that peace is a mindset... it is a way of thinking. But not just a way of thinking; it is a way of feeling and acting. It is a kind of moral discernment that shapes our lives if we will allow it. In the text we have before us, we have an important Greek word that's almost impossible to be translated into English—the word is *phronesis*; in the NSRV, it is translated as "of same mind." In other concepts in scripture, it's referred to by Paul in Romans and translated as "a renewing of the mind." It is a way of practical reasoning; it's a pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting...

shaped by the story of Christ. So we see in verse 2 that we are to “be of the same mind.” To have the story shape us, we might say it this way: that the frame of reference we have produces a disposition of character.

Paul tells us that those who seek peace in Christ—who allow the Lordship of Jesus to reign in their lives—will be shaped and formed in dramatic ways. Let me suggest two: the frame of reference of Jesus as Lord shapes us to be men and women of integrity. If you understand integrity to be Lordship in community, Paul tells us that we are to “have the same mind... the same love... full accord... of one mind.” There is, in the sense of the very nature of the word ‘integrity,’ which comes from the root meaning of “integral:” One. We’re called to be one — that the peace that Jesus gives us, and the life of reconciliation that comes to us, comes to make us one. And that forms in us a character and a disposition of thinking about others before ourselves; it’s oneness... Lordship in community. But, it also produces in us the virtue of humility. Lordship of mind and action... Lordship of heart. Paul says, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or vain conceit; but in humility, regard others better than yourselves. Let each of you look, not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Have these thoughts, these feelings, these actions in you. In verse 5 he uses this word again, *phronesis*, where he exhorts the Philippians, and so us: “Let this same mind, let these thoughts, feelings, and actions be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, though he was in the very form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, something to be exploited.” In sign language, the sign for Jesus is this: the sign of nail-wounded hands—a symbol, not only of his sacrifice, but a reminder to us that, whenever we grasp onto something for our own benefit, we fail to be like Jesus. Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped... to be exploited. Though he had all the power in the universe, he did not exploit that power; rather, he did the opposite—he took the form of a slave. “He, who was in the form of God, took the form of a slave; he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” That is our story. And through that story we understand that peace and reconciliation are not merely concepts that we put into place when we are in trouble... or in crisis... or in conflict; but that reconciliation is a way of life. It’s a way of thinking and acting that turns all of the standards of power and position upside down, in the example of Jesus.

But how do we do that? How do we do that in our everyday life? How is it possible to have this mind, to have this attitude? How is it possible to live today, and to leave this place today with the peace of Christ in our hearts, so that we might be redemptive people—men and women—in our workplace, in our neighborhoods, and in our positions around the world, to influence people for Jesus Christ? Paul goes on, in chapter 3, to use his own life as an example. The context is a warning to the Philippians about people called Judaizers who are coming in for the last ten years; everywhere Paul goes, they follow him. They go in after him and say, “Yes, Jesus is good, and faith in him is fine; but really, what you need is the Law. What you need are these standards. What you need are all of these things that you’ve got to complete.” Paul wants to remind the Philippians: No. We have a different story that guides our life. We don’t put confidence in our pedigree... or in our achievement... or in our power... or our status. We, as followers of Jesus, have learned a new way to think... a new way to act... a new way to be formed. And so he says, “Those who put confidence in the flesh: if you want confidence in the flesh, I have more.” And he goes on to say, “I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews; I’m from the tribe of Benjamin.” I have all the credentials. I have all the training. But then he says, “I consider all of these things, which the world says ‘gain,’ I consider loss.” See, that’s what reconciliation means. That’s what it means to be reconciled to something — you reconcile your checkbooks; you balance the balance sheets; the gains and the losses. And now Paul wants us to hear, with the Philippians, that we need a mind and a heart to turn what happens in our everyday world—particularly in this city—upside down; and to live a life of contrast; to live a life that sees Jesus as Lord... where our confidence, and our story, is shaped by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. He goes on to say that, “all of these things that I might have considered gain, I now consider loss.” I renounce them; I renounce any grounds for boasting in my own training, achievement, or status. In fact, Paul goes on to say that “I consider them as rubbish.” Note, however, he doesn’t renounce his birth or his status. He just says, “I have learned to consider these accomplishments, and status, and power, as unimportant compared to the surpassing knowledge of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord.” I’ve learned to narrate my life in such a way that I am no longer the subject; but I place myself in a story where Jesus Christ is Lord.

What does it mean to be a redemptive community? What does it mean to be people of peace and grace? It means understanding that Jesus comes to us as a person who is real and living, and is the answer to every issue, every crisis, every fear in your life. That you can leave this place this morning, having benefited from the wonder and the grace of music and meeting in this wonderful place; but you don’t leave it behind because Jesus goes with you. You take Jesus into the world and you live a life guided by his life, his death, the model of his work in the world. And as we go out, we live in such a way that we interpret our life from the perspective of Christ. Paul goes on to say, there’s more... there’s more... there’s more: an ever-deepening union with the triune God.

Whose peace will you leave with this morning? Which story will you follow this week? May the peace of Jesus Christ himself give you peace and make in you a reconciling way of life, that you might stand in contrast to a world that has no hope beyond itself. There is hope, and the hope is in Christ. Let us pray. Father, we love you, and we thank you that, in Jesus Christ, we are made one, and we are called to peace. We praise your holy name. Amen.