

The Peace of Christ

Menno Mennonite Church

October 11, 2026

Purpose: To consider our general state of anxiety within the frame work of the peace of Christ.

Message: We are not asked to lay aside our anxieties as a matter of avoidance, but placing that which we fear into the context of Christ.

Scripture: Philippians 4:1-9 (I will read); Psalm 23 (please read)

Synopsis: We are invested in our worry. We are given much about which to worry and be concerned over. Culturally, we take our responsibilities quite seriously. Our preparations for the future and the anticipations of what might be often ask us to hold tightly to our plans and intentions lest we be found wanting. Yet in the midst of the worst of all that the world can deal to us, we are invite in the God's peace, knowing that the Spirit is at work in our midst beyond our plans and problems, we are invited into the peace of Christ. This is something that is not about us, but is about God, and the work that God is doing in our midst.

Philippians 4:1–9 (CEB)

4 Therefore,
my brothers and sisters whom I love and miss,
who are my joy and crown,
stand firm in the Lord.

Loved ones,
² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to come to an agreement in the Lord.
³ Yes, and I'm also asking you, loyal friend,
to help these women
who have struggled together with me
in the ministry of the gospel,
along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers
whose names are in the scroll of life.

⁴ Rejoice; Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad!

⁵ Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people.
The Lord is near.

⁶ Don't be anxious about anything;
rather, bring up all of your requests to God
in your prayers and petitions,
along with giving thanks.

⁷ Then the peace of God that exceeds
all understanding will keep your hearts
and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

⁸ From now on, brothers and sisters,
if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable,
focus your thoughts on these things:

all that is true, all that is holy,
all that is just, all that is pure,
all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise.

⁹ Practice these things:
whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us.
The God of peace will be with you.

I don't know about you, but my mind is a rather busy place of late. Beyond the obvious stuff of having a lot to think about and work through in a demanding season, there is a lot of things floating out there that demand our attention almost without ceasing. There is a lot going on out there. Were I to ask you to take 20 seconds and take turns sharing non stop with your neighbor about the anxieties that pop in your head, there would be plenty of talking well beyond a set time frame (provided we could get ourselves to speak those things at all, but that is a different thing). I am not going to have mandatory sharing time-- it is OK you can stop looking for the exists. There is a lot out there to carry, the stuff that we wonder about and can cause us fear. We all carry our stuff—big and small. We have become accustomed to the feeling that something might not be right. Anxiety as a diagnosed disorder has spiked markedly and we are left wondering what to do. There is much that is hard to understand and hard to live with. We have had to. There is an intuitive sense that we have: we sit with our anxious selves a great deal. We worry. We hold on. We allow the fear of the ways things may or may not work out to reside with us day and night.

Our worries are there for each one of us, individual in their shape, size, and sharpness even as they connect us one to the next. Provision. Future. Choices. We know it is part of the human experience, but that doesn't always make it easier to live with. Verses like these telling us to simply stop worrying might be helpful reminders but rarely do they stop us from keeping right on worrying. Because at the root of worry is fear. A fear that there will not be enough (have we ever worried that the balance in our checkbooks would contain more than what we expect?). A fear that what is present now will somehow be taken away. A fear that every change and bump and alteration in what we know to be true and solid and immovable might be what starts all of our lives collapsing around us. A knowing fear that we, all of us, are finite, and our world and its needs so often seem infinite. All of this and so much more. When we get into the thrall of fear, preoccupied with worry, that we begin to see the scarcity in which we live. It is hard to think about just about anything else. While a sense of scarcity might be a fine way to run a free market economy (You can't sell things without some basic fear that there won't be any more where that comes from), it is no way to run a church. It is no way to live a life of faith.

Say what you will about Paul but there was little about the human experience that escaped his notice. He comes time and again to the fundamentals about how we think and function and speaks to it. There is no different. He is doing what he is always is—touching base

with the congregations and the people in them that have been part of his spreading of the Gospel. He is holding up the way forward for those who he was writing to as much of that which came before—hold all things up before the God in whom you have been reconciled and are being changed, and in that process you will come to understand things differently, wholly. That includes the stuff that you worry about. He advises us to give it up completely and rejoice instead. This advice is lent credibility in this context—he himself had plenty to worry about, and needed to find peace within. He was writing from a Roman prison a context where he was in physical and mental danger the whole time. He had every bit as much reason for worry and anxiety as anyone else, instead he is commending the peace of Christ to other people far away. But he commends us to the work of changing the mindset of fear into something that is far different and far more a part of the way of the kingdom. He does not condemn the thought. He does not mock the preoccupation. He simply offers an alternative: instead of thinking about the stuff that is beyond you, consider that which is of God and in God as an alternative to the narrative of fear. I dare think that were he given a bit more parchment he might have had more coaching of who to go about something like that.

Because we know that this is hard. It demands a lot to change how we think about the world in which we live and to relinquish the demands that our news feeds make of us. We were not created to carry the weights of the world on our shoulders, but that does not stop us from trying and hard. God created us that we might share in the beauty of a created world, a beauty that we ourselves help compose. We don't easily remember this, just as we don't remember that our provision does not come from ourselves but from God. We need the help of the Spirit in our midst to reprogram ourselves to the best of the world, and not the worst; to break the domination of scarcity in our minds and to consider instead the abundance of the world. Philippians 4 helps us do just that: work on training our hearts and minds toward what the world is and what the kingdom is and toward what God has for us. "Rejoice [cheer] in the Lord always," Paul writes in verse 4. "I will say it again: Rejoice." As we focus our thoughts on God, as well as God's goodness and purposes, the Spirit uses this to cultivate the joy beyond what is. We cultivate gentleness before all as a way of concentrating on what is good and lovely in our neighbors and not just the stuff that might drive us nuts. We easily concentrate on the ways that people around us are part of the ugliness of our world. We are changed when we recall that God resides with those who are hurting the most, and even with those who are doing the hurting in some cases.

On top of all that, verse 6 suggest Jesus' followers who want to focus on what's lovely spend much time in prayer. We don't let our worries crowd lovely things out of our minds. Christians are not "anxious [merimnate] about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present" our "requests to God." With gratitude we prayerfully beg God to help us concentrate not on what makes us fret, but on things that are lovely. These are not passive notions to decorate our walls with but are practical applications of the ways and means how we begin to think differently. The more we think on that which is of God—not as a denial of what is out there and what does worry us but as a context that we can use to reframe all of that into the logic of a loving God who will bring peace, full peace, in all things—the more we can make sense of the world that we live in and the fears we carry, and access the peace of Christ which is ours.

We call ourselves a historic peace church as Mennonites (a weird term I know). What is meant by that is that we hold as one of our basic ideas is that the way of Christ is the way of peace in the world. This peace is the physical nonresistance that we are offered as a challenge to practice in our lives and, ultimately in our world. We say this because we absolutely believe it to be true. But too often we put a notion of peace out there that is way too narrow. We settled for the socio political sense where we don't kill each other type of peace as primary and neglect the peace of Christ—the peace that passes all understanding, the peace that surpasses our logical hopes. We concentrate on sociology because it is the stuff we can understand. We struggle with the theological peace because it seems so far from our world and our existence. We don't know how to connect the two as well as we should. At the end of the day we cannot and should not do one without the other. The contention that we ought to be people of peace in the world and not return violence for violence is not a statement of strategic logic or effective protective politics. It is not particularly a notion of who we ought to keep ourselves safe from all the stuff that is out there from coming and impacting us in here. It is not that and it cannot be that.

We can only do this, we can only do the work of worldly peace if we are conversant with the spiritual peace of Christ that roots us and binds us beyond your worries, beyond our anxieties and reminds us that this world in which we live is not, finally the world which has the final say, that we can even entertain placing our faith where it belongs: in the one who holds all things today, tomorrow and always. We need to be a peace church of the truer sense of the word: the

church that knows its peace is held in its relationship with the living Christ and out of that relationship we are compelled into the work of building the peace of the world.

Because that peace is the rooting of all things in our context. The promise we receive is not that we can be offered a life outside the anxiety of life, but rather that Christ's peace will be our anchor within our circumstances within them. Even when those realities can become deadly real, the center of our selves rests within the goodness of God and nowhere else. Our prayers and supplications to God are not the things that we perform in order to get access to our sense of peace, a meditation performed in order to get the payout or protection. It is rather the functional work that we put in to reaching out in the midst of our fears and our challenges to be reminded of the peace that comes even when we are not expecting it. This peace isn't about making sense of things but instead about giving a framework through which we can see the world outside what is in front of us and to hold on to the work of the God in the midst of it all.

God chose to come and inhabit this finitude that we so fear, to enter into the uncertainty, trouble and fear of this thing we call human existence. The point was to give us something bigger than us, bigger than the reality as we know it. The point was to give us the Kingdom of God, that wondrous mystery that connects the broken present to the deathless eternity. We have become Easter people, those who have been given a taste of eternal life. We do not vapidly pretend that everything will be ok, or that there are no fears in our present world. Rather, we know that our worries do not have the final word. Our fear does not carry final power over us, but rather we occupy the space God has created for us come what may. And for that we can be thankful in all things always.

May the gift of God's gracious peace be with us, and hold us fast even when the world sweeps around us. Amen.