

In all things, Peace
Menno Mennonite Church
November 17, 2019

Purpose: to explore the Spiritual base of God's peace with us

Message: We are given the nature peace even when culturally we are invited to anxiously controlling all things.

Scripture: Phillipians 4:2-9 [I will read]; Psalm 91:1-6; 11-16

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.

Refer to https://mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/website_files/peace_sunday_2019_en_-_final_small.pdf for materials

Philippians 4:2-9

² I urge Euodia

and I urge Syntyche

to be of the same mind in the Lord.

³ Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion,

help these women,

for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel,

together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers,

whose names are in the book of life.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always;

again I will say, Rejoice.

⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone.

The Lord is near.

⁶ Do not worry 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.

⁸ Finally, beloved,

whatever is true,

whatever is honorable,

whatever is just,

whatever is pure,

whatever is pleasing,

whatever is commendable,

if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise,

think about these things.

⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned

and received and heard and seen in me,

and the God of peace will be with you.

VISUALIZATION: Peace

What are you anxious about today? I am guessing that I don't need to leave a huge amount of time for you to think about your answer to that particular question. If I was to ask you to turn to your neighbor and ask you to share about this with each other (I'm not going to do this—you can stop your gradual edging toward the door to escape) there wouldn't be too much silence in the room. Because we all carry our stuff, so much so that we have become far too accustomed to it. Anxiety as a significant illness has increased rapidly from a mental health perspective, but more than that which is diagnosed, there is a 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 as they connect with each of us. Provision. Future. Choices. It is part of our lives both personally and together. And verses like these telling us to simply stop worrying might be helpful reminders and all, but rarely does it 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. When we get into the thrall of fear, preoccupied with worry, that we begin to see the scarcity in which we live, and we wonder whether there will be enough to go around, to do what we want and need to do. 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.

Paul's writing here is meant to address this exact problem of how we function as people. 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. Here he starts he closing to this brief letter by calling on friends in the church to be reconciled. 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. This advice is lent credibility in this context—namely that 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. Likely chained and bound, he would have been denied freedom and was likely beaten. 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.

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. But too often we put this notion of peace—the socio political worldly don't kill each other type of peace on one side and the peace of Christ—the peace that passes all understanding, the peace that surpasses our logical hopes—on the other. We are not always very good at connecting the two as we should. Because 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 practice. 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. Rather, 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 yet again 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. 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 in the end, but 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 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.

All of which this is all about the work of the Holy Spirit. The peace of the Spirit, the sustaining peace that sees us through the things of the world is not something of our summoning, but rather a gift given when we need it, and often is only in retrospect. The first of November was Emily and my fifth wedding anniversary. We took the opportunity to look back on where we have been and what we have done in those short years: move 3 times, grieved Emily's father who died shortly after we were married, had 2 kids, a couple of near-death experiences, spent 53 days in Neonatal intensive care with Luke, bought, renovated, and sold our first home together, and then moved out to yet another country. So far, years 5-10 seem to promise similar highlights, though we are looking forward to staying in the same place for a good while. I don't raise this to hold us up as the example of or for anything. We have gone through this with as much worry and discomfort as anyone else. But at the same time we have been and continue to be met time and again with what we have needed when we needed it, and with the resiliency to make it through any of this with something approaching a sense of humor. I can't explain it; I can't make heads or tails of it, except to say that it is the prayers of those who have been around us who have given us access to the well of Christ's peace through all of this. There has been worry plenty, and there still is, but we have been given peace in the midst of it all, and for that we are thankful.

Maybe this is some of what we do for and with each other—to point to the peace of Christ with each other. When we hold each other in prayer and through the stuff of life, we are connecting the thin roots of hope back to the deep well of faith that is the peace we have between us. As much as we would like to suggest otherwise, our work of faith is not about rationalizing the world around us to make it into something we can handle, rather it is taking on the world as it is knowing that this world is not that which has the final say in our lives, in our universe and for our futures. In this we are visited with Christ's peace that is not contingent on the circumstance around us or our ability to cope with what lies in front of us. Rather it is the promise that the Spirit will be with us in all circumstances, connecting us to what we most need—the confidence to continue—far more than the simplistic removal of that would make us uncomfortable.

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 not 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.