

Peace in the Midst
Mark 4:35 – 41; Galatians 5:19 – 23
Sunday, July 14, 2019

We're spending this summer looking at the Fruit of the Spirit; this idea that, if you are living your life by the Spirit of God, led by the Spirit, certain things will *take root* and *grow* in you. Your life will bear a certain kind of fruit. Your words and actions will bear witness to a *love* that is patient and kind and seeks to nurture and build up. You will have a *joy* that is not dependent on your circumstances and surroundings, because it is the result of a fullness inside of you; an awareness of God's love for you. So we have love, we have joy, and to that Paul adds *peace*. If we are being led by the Spirit of God, desiring the things of the Spirit, then we will live in ways that *experience* and *produce* peace.

Now, a lot of times we think of peace as simply being "the absence of war or conflict." That when we stop fighting, there will be *peace*. That *world peace* will come when we are no longer fighting any wars. But peace, *true peace*, is deeper than that. The Greek word for *peace* that Paul used when talking about the Fruit of the Spirit is the word *eirene*. It means *tranquility, serenity, contentment, safety, prosperity*. The Hebrew word for *peace* that Jesus would have used is the word *shalom*. It means *harmony, wholeness, balance, everything is in order* and working *together*, the way it's *supposed* to, the way it was *created* to. You can sign a peace treaty and end a war, and still not have *that* kind of peace.

My grandfather fought in WWII. Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945, and the war was over. But for the next 60 years, until the day he died, my grandfather *refused* to buy a Japanese-made automobile because, he said, he did not trust the Japanese because of what they did during the war. Didn't stop him from buying Japanese-made TVs and stereos, but you get the point. The fighting stopped...but there wasn't really *peace* for a lot of people.

How many peace treaties have been signed in the Middle East? And how many times has the fighting just started right back up because we haven't solved the *real*, underlying problem between the people involved?

Because there are *two kinds of peace* in life. There is an *external* peace in which everything *around* you is in *harmony* and *order*. The people and the things around you are *working together*, the way they were *created* to. The world around you is in a state of *tranquility* and *serenity* and *contentment* and *safety*. When two nations that are at war *stop fighting*. When the kids are playing nicely together, not screaming, fighting, crying. *That is external peace.*

And then there's an *internal* peace in which everything *within* you is in *harmony* and *order*. Your heart and mind are *working together*, working the way they were *created to*. Your innermost being is in a state of *tranquility* and *serenity* and *contentment* and *safety*. You have this feeling like, "It's *good*," or at least, "It's *going to be good*." *That is internal peace.*

You can't have true *external* peace without true *internal* peace. You can't be at peace with the world around you if you're not at peace with yourself. But you *can* have true *internal* peace without *external* peace; when everything is in chaos and the world is falling apart around you, you can *still* have *internal* peace. Because *internal* peace is *not dependent* on your *circumstances* or what is going on *around* you. But if you *have* this internal peace, it will naturally flow forth *from* you into the world *around* you. And *this* is what we see in Jesus.

We heard this story about Jesus calming the storm in Mark's gospel. This is at the end of chapter four. Up to this point in Mark's gospel, Jesus has been going non-stop: he's been teaching,

healing people, constantly surrounded by *huge* crowds of people. Finally, he says to his disciples, “Let’s just get into a boat and go over to the other side.” Away from the crowds. Away from the busyness. And maybe for a little while, he can have some peace. But as they’re sailing across to the other side, a storm pops up. The winds are blowing hard. Waves are crashing down all around them. It’s pouring rain. There’s lightning and thunder. Water is starting to come *in* to the boat. The disciples are terrified, worried that the boat is going to capsize and sink. And where is Jesus? Asleep on a cushion.

What could make it possible for someone to be asleep and resting and at *peace* when there is a storm raging all around? And is it possible for *us*? Because we *all* face storms. We all have times in life when we’re getting battered and knocked around and we’re afraid that we’re just going to sink. What is it that allows Jesus to be completely at peace when the storm is at its worst and everyone *else* is terrified?

Jesus has *shalom*, harmony, order, wholeness at work inside of him. It’s like we said last week with joy: the *peace* that Jesus experiences is the result of being in right relationship with God and with himself. He has harmony with God, and he has harmony with himself. He knows who he *is*, what he is *about*, what his *purpose* is.

There’s a story back at the end of chapter one where Jesus tries to sneak away by himself to get away from the crowds, but the disciples find him and say, “Everyone is looking for you!” Jesus says, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there. For that is what I came to do.” Jesus has a clear sense of *purpose*, of *God’s* purpose for him. His life is *ordered* according to what God wants for him. He knows who he is, he knows what his purpose is, and he is *okay with that*. He doesn’t need to *be* anyone else or *do* anything else, and he

doesn't get caught up in all this other stuff that is *not* a part of that purpose. “*This* is what I need to focus on.” And because of that clarity about *who he is* and *what he's about*, Jesus has *peace*.

Author Doug Frank writes that God wants us to simply *be ourselves*, “accepting ourselves and others just as we are, limitations, vulnerabilities, and major imperfections included,” because that frees us to “love and act fearlessly with power and authority.” *Jesus* accepts himself *just the way he is*, and he accepts others just the way *they* are, limitations, vulnerabilities, and major imperfections included, which sets Jesus free to love and act fearlessly with power and authority. When *we* can accept *ourselves just the way we are*, with our limitations, vulnerabilities, imperfections; when we can accept *ourselves* the way *God* accepts us, and stop trying to prove ourselves or be anyone else, we will find *peace*, and it will set us free to live and love without fear.

So, because of that *inner* peace that Jesus has, he is sound asleep in the middle of the storm. The disciples come and wake him up and shout, “Don't you *care* that we're about to *die* here?!” Jesus stands up, and what does he say? “Peace...be still.” Jesus takes that *internal peace* and injects harmony, order, and wholeness into the world around him. It flows out from him, into the world around him, and the storm *stops*. Jesus shows us that if we are able to find *internal* peace and harmony with ourselves and with God, then that peace will flow out from us to bring peace and calm to even the *worst* storms of life.

Paul talks about this in his letter to the Philippians. The church in Philippi is in *conflict*. People are *fighting*. So Paul writes to them and basically says, “There is no *peace* in your church. There is *external* conflict. And you're *worrying* about it. And the way you're going to take care of that,” he says, “is by first seeking *internal* peace.” Paul writes, “Do not worry about *anything*,

but in *everything*, with prayer and thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

It is *so easy* when the storms come in life to get frazzled and lose control and say, “What about *this*? What about *that*?” Like the disciples did, “What if the boats tips over? What if we sink? What if we die? What if *this* happens? What if *that* happens?” But Paul says *that* stuff, *that* kind of thinking isn’t going to change that situation, and it isn’t going to give you peace. When you’re doing that, you’re not at harmony. Your life is not in order. You don’t have that *shalom*.

But instead of doing that, you can turn to God, like the disciples *ended up* doing in that boat, and say, “Here’s what’s going on. I need your help.” If you can do *that*, then you’re not running around all over the place with *what ifs*. You’re *focused*. You’re directing it all toward God. You have more *harmony* and *order*. And Paul says the peace of God will guard your heart and mind.

The word that Paul uses there for *guard* is not a *theological* term. It is a Greek *military* term that literally means, “to stand guard” like a soldier does when he’s watching out for an invading army. He stands at the gate to the city and watches out for any sign of danger so that he can keep the people inside safe. Think about those soldiers over in England who wear the big fuzzy black hats and stand guard outside the Queen’s palace. They stand there, perfectly still. They don’t move, they don’t *blink*, they don’t get distracted. They just stand there and *watch*.

Paul is saying that if you take this thing, this situation that is worrying you or weighing on you or *attacking* you, if you take it and focus yourself and bring it to God, then God’s peace is going to

stand guard like that at the gate of your heart and mind, watching out for any sign of danger, making sure nothing gets in. It's going to keep everything inside safe. It's going to *preserve peace* inside you.

The Philippians are worried about *external peace*, but Paul says, you're never going to *find that* until you find *internal peace*. And when you have that *internal peace*, it spills out into every other aspect of your life. You'll find peace with *each other* when you find it with *yourself*. Jesus has an *internal peace*, but the point is not to keep it to himself so that *he* is okay. Jesus' *internal peace* flows out into the world around him to create *external peace*. Not just so *he* can be okay, but so *everyone* can be okay.

There's a place in John's gospel where Jesus is talking about how he's going to be killed soon, and he's going to have to leave his disciples. And he says to them, "Peace I leave with you; *my peace* I give to you. I do not give to you as the *world* gives to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid."

I do not give peace to you as the world gives peace to you. How does the *world* give peace? What is the *world's* idea of peace? The absence of war. The *world* regards peace as the absence of *external* conflict. It's about *eliminating* the *external threat*. But Jesus says, "That's not the way that *I* give peace. That's not the peace that I'm talking about." The peace that Christ gives is not just the *absence* of conflict, but *peace in the midst* of conflict.

When Jesus says, "Peace...be still," he's not just talking to that *storm*. He's talking to those *disciples*, saying, "You don't *need* to worry. I'm standing guard here. And I have *power* over

this storm.” And he’s also talking to *us*. “Peace...be still. I’m standing guard. And I have power over *this* storm, too.”

When we are living according to the Spirit of God, our lives will be characterized by peace and harmony and order, inside and out, because we won’t be fighting with *ourselves*, and we won’t be fighting with *each other*. We won’t *have* to fight, because we know that God is standing guard.