

Second Sunday After Pentecost – Year A
June 14, 2020
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- SERMON -

This morning, if I were speaking to a different group of people, with all the news and events that's been going on the last couple of weeks, I might be talking to you today about the importance of diversity, of accepting people of other races and cultures.

But after serving here at Good Shepherd for 6 1/2 years, I happen to know that *you* are a congregation who already knows about that. Good Shepherd is a family with color, with different cultures and backgrounds. You are already involved in uniting diverse faiths together in walks of peace. You already love and minister to each other and to those out in the community without regard to their differences. So, I don't feel that is the message that's needed here this morning.

But I do know that these events that have been taking place, along with the COVID-19 virus quarantines, lifestyle changes, illnesses, loss of loved ones and differences of political opinion, have weighed on all of us. The stresses brought on - thus far this year, have been very difficult and stressful.

So, I feel what we need most today is PEACE. Peace!

I feel we need to step away for a few minutes and regroup.

A number of times in the gospels Jesus used the words, "Peace be with you." Or "Go in peace." It was, and is, important to Jesus that we - have - peace.

Just because we live in a culture of stress and pressure, that does NOT mean we have to adopt that culture within ourselves. We can make a commitment that we're NOT going to live according to what's going on around us, but rather make decisions based on the leadership of the Holy Spirit who is our Helper and source of revelation, wisdom, and power.

Jesus was surrounded by stressful situations throughout his ministry. And in the midst of this in John 14:27 toward the end of his ministry and life, he said, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don't be troubled or afraid."

Definition of "peace" is:

- freedom from disturbance; tranquility.
- calm · calmness · restfulness
- a state or period in which there is no war or a war has ended. (That war might be within you)

Think about a body of water. When a storm comes up, you'll see the rippling and a disturbance on the surface, but down deep, it's quiet... That's why 'peace' is described sometimes as a 'quiet heart'.

All kinds of things can be going on around us, but if we stay in communication with God, and we continue to lean on him, rely on Him, we can still have His peace. That doesn't mean we have to love the circumstance, and that doesn't mean it doesn't hurt. But it does mean that we can have this special kind of peace even in disruptive times.

The peace that the world offers is a peace that only works when circumstances suit us. But Jesus has given us something that is far superior to that. He's given us a peace that is 'beyond understanding'. A peace that just doesn't make any sense.

There are times when I don't know HOW I can have peace when everything around me is in an uproar. It may be awkward to tell someone you have peace, because they're just going to think you're being hyper religious or something, but you honestly can have peace in the most difficult circumstance, if you have committed relationship with God.

I Peter 3:11 says we are to "... seek peace and chase after it."

Not just seek it, but CHASE after it."

The definition of "chase" is:

- to follow rapidly
- pursue; hunt
- to follow regularly or persistently with intention

Peace is so important in our lives that we are to chase it!

We can have peace even in a time of trouble. And having times of trouble isn't always a bad thing. Our New Testament reading this morning says, "... we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope." And that hope brings us to the love of God which has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Now, to allow a time of peace - right now, I want you to clear your thoughts, sit back, close your eyes if you wish, as I read some passages in scripture:

Psalm 121

¹I raise my eyes toward the mountains.

Where will my help come from?

²My help comes from the LORD,
the maker of heaven and earth.

³ God won't let your foot slip.
Your protector won't fall asleep on the job.
⁴ No! Israel's protector
never sleeps or rests!
⁵ The LORD is your protector;
the LORD is your shade right beside you.
⁶ The sun won't strike you during the day;
neither will the moon at night.
⁷ The LORD will protect you from all evil;
God will protect your very life.
⁸ The LORD will protect you on your journeys—
whether going or coming—
from now until forever from now.

Isaiah 49

⁸ The LORD said:
At the right time, I answered you;
on a day of salvation, I helped you.
I have guarded you,
and given you as a covenant to the people, to restore the land,
and to reassign deserted properties,
⁹ saying to the prisoners, "Come out,"
and to those in darkness, "Show yourselves."
Along the roads animals will graze;
their pasture will be on every treeless hilltop.
¹⁰ They won't hunger or thirst;
the burning heat and sun won't strike them,
because one who has compassion for them will lead them
and will guide them by springs of water.
¹¹ I will turn all my mountains into roads;
my highways will be built up.

¹³ Sing, heavens! Rejoice, earth!
Break out, mountains, with a song.
The LORD has comforted his people,
and taken pity on those who suffer.

Psalms 91

¹ Living in the Most High's shelter,
camping in the Almighty's shade,

² I say to the LORD, “You are my refuge, my stronghold!
You are my God—the one I trust!”

⁴ God will protect you with his pinions;
you’ll find refuge under his wings.
His faithfulness is a protective shield.

¹⁴ God says, “Because you are devoted to me,
I’ll rescue you.
I’ll protect you because you know my name.

¹⁵ Whenever you cry out to me, I’ll answer.
I’ll be with you in troubling times.
I’ll save you and glorify you.

¹⁶ I’ll fill you full with old age.
I’ll show you my salvation.”

Revelation 21

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away,
and the sea was no more.

² I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a
bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

³ I heard a loud voice from the throne say,
“Look! God’s dwelling is here with humankind.
He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples.
God himself will be with them as their God.

⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more. There will be no mourning,
crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

⁵ Then the one seated on the throne said,
“Look! I’m making all things new.” He also said,
“Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

⁶ Then he said to me, “All is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will freely give water
from the life-giving spring.

⁷ Those who emerge victorious will inherit these things.
I will be their God, and they will be my sons and daughters.

Yes, stress is all around us. But we can learn how to be in the world, and not act like the world.

I believe the only reason Jesus could calm the storm we heard about a few weeks ago is because he had peace on the inside of him.

In peace we can learn how to NOT react to everything that’s going on around us. Rather than RE-act, we can act, pray, minister to others. Instead of negativity, which this world has enough of, we can spread peace and help calm the storm that others may be drowning in.

Our gospel reading this morning says that "...When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

As we see and hear today, the crowds today are troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. What - do - people - do who are in a storm - wandering around troubled and helpless, in need of a shepherd – someone to guide and direct them? Without that guide, they'll grab the first hand that reaches out to them.

Jesus said to his disciples, "The size of the harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers." We are the workers. But for us to do God's work, we need his calm and his peace, to allow us to better serve.

As we prayed in our Collect of the Day this morning – in our bulletins (top of Page 2 / Page 3) - "God of tender care, like a mother, like a father, you never forget your children, and you know already what we need. In all our anxiety, give us trusting and faithful hearts, that in confidence we may embody the peace and justice of your son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord."

Amen.