

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *Peace, No. 1*

Worthy of Pursuit

March 5, 2023

Psalm 34:8-14 (NIV)

Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

⁹ *Fear the Lord, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing.* ¹⁰ *The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.* ¹¹ *Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.*

¹² *Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days,* ¹³ *keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies.* ¹⁴ *Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.*

1 Peter 3:8-12(NIV)

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ *Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.* ¹⁰ *For:*

"Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. ¹¹ *They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.* ¹² *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."*

We're in First Peter this morning, if you'd care to turn there. The letter of First Peter, Chapter 3.

In these weeks of Lent, these weeks before Resurrection Day, I felt led, quite a while back actually, to focus on peace.

I could not get away from that Colossians 1 passage: ***"For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Jesus, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in Heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross."***¹

Peace through Jesus' death on the cross.

That's the image and the offer of God that has stuck with me – and I suppose it's not surprising.

Peace is something everyone needs; we'll go crazy without it.

So many, it seems, are searching for it these days, and yet relatively few seem to find it – in any lasting way.

We touched on this a couple weeks ago.

Superintendent Lane talked about it some throughout this past week.

So many people – no matter their ages, no matter their nationalities, no matter their wealth or places in society – so many are tense and troubled today.

Even little kids, you know?

Man, when I was a kid, I didn't have a care in the world, and neither did any kid I knew.

The fact is that regarding school, both my parents and teachers wished I cared more.

But now, so many kids are strung as tight as piano wires.

Truly, I didn't believe in stress. I didn't think stress was a real thing until the year I turned 29, which happens to be the same year I got married and became a pastor.

I don't know if there's a correlation there or not... But you can't deny it's real today.

People don't sleep well; they don't eat well; they don't slow down. The young worry about living and the old worry about dying – and vice versa – to the point that much of our society doesn't know what peace even looks like.

In the same way I didn't think *stress* was real, there's a big part of our society that wonders if *peace* is real – if it's *achievable*, or if it's just some imaginary state of mind.

And you know, part of our work as Christ's Church is to tell them that peace is real and achievable – and it is so regardless of circumstance.

You know, Jesus introduced a lot of contention into our world, and then He died violently on a cross. But just the same, ironically, He's also the greatest bringer-of-peace the world has ever known.

And He's still bringing peace to those who will trust Him, because God does not want people – God does not want *anyone* – to live with anxiety and fear.

God wants people to find peace, regardless of circumstances, and the only place we can find it is in Jesus.

That's the message of Peter here.

In so many ways this letter could have been written to us today.

You see, there was a time early in the first century when Christianity was new and when Christ-followers had nothing to fear from their government. In fact, the book of Acts reports how, many times it was the *government*, the Roman government, that *saved* the Apostle Paul and others from the rage of the Jewish leaders and idol-worshippers.

But over time, the governmental heart toward Christians changed.

Why?

Well, when a person, Joe or Jane Roman, began to follow Jesus, sometimes they had to pull back from other people – friends, even from family members – who encouraged sinful behavior, and that confused and at times angered others who looked on.

Christians met together quite a lot and very faithfully, and sometimes that disrupted long-standing schedules.

New priorities change people, you see?

¹ Colossians 1:19-20 (NIV)

And then, of course, we do this Holy Communion stuff where we “eat Jesus’ body and drink Jesus’ blood.” That certainly raised the eyebrows of those who didn’t understand what we meant by that.

People began to ask, “Hey, what kind of weird group is this anyway?”

And besides, Christians are also connected to Jews, who have never been, broadly speaking, liked or particularly appreciated.

Antisemitism is nothing new in our world.

So, you had all that going on.

And then, of course, recognizing all this pre-existent vulnerability, in a desperate attempt at diversion, the emperor Nero, in the year 64, blamed Christians for the burning of Rome.

So that, coupled with all the rest, caused a shift in the way people thought about Christ-followers, and a severe persecution erupted.

Wherever there’s a vacuum in understanding, all sorts of fears and suspicions pour in.

That’s always been true, and it’s still true today.

Just this past week, some of you saw how an Arizona public school board voted to end an agreement regarding student teaching with a college in Glendale simply because the college is Christian.

Board members determined the college is dangerous because its website says it is “committed to Jesus Christ, accomplishing his will – on earth as in Heaven,” which includes, “promoting the Biblically-informed values that are foundational to Western civilization, including the centrality of family, traditional sexual morality, and lifelong marriage between a man and a woman.”

Doing that is now dangerous, you see, to our society.

Or, to say it another way, “The real problem with the world is Christians.”

We’re beginning to hear that more and more today, aren’t we? Just as those earliest believers, to whom Peter originally wrote, began hearing it.

Throughout his letter here, Peter tells us they were suffering many severe trials. They were called “evil-doers” and threats to society, and he says they were afflicted and accused of slander.² And all of this was causing them not a little anxiety and fear, which is precisely why Peter writes what he does here about peace.

Peter says that there is a way to overcome, a way to find and keep inner peace, even when the whole world seems to be against you.

The way to peace is, in a word, *humility*.

Humility leads to peace.

Peter writes in verse 10 there, “*Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. ¹¹ They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.*”

Where did Peter get an idea like that?

Well, he got it from King David, the writer of Psalm 34, which he quotes nearly verbatim.

You see, what King David found, and what Peter found and Jesus demonstrated, is that we’ll never find the deep peace we’re looking for by steeling ourselves and hardening our attitudes against those who persecute us.

We will never reach peace by constantly arguing or lashing out at them or at our culture as they accuse and threaten us.

That’s not the way to peace.

Of all people, Peter learned that the hard way, didn’t he? He learned that jumping in to argue and cutting off the ears of those who oppose us, whether we do that literally or figuratively by the words we speak or write: none of that ever leads to peace.

What leads to peace is *living rightly* – humbly before the Lord, no matter what.

Peter writes there beginning with verse 8, “*All of you – be unified, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Don’t repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing – to this you were called, so that you may inherit a blessing*” (paraphrase).

You see, when the world is abused, it abuses in return. But Jesus’ body, the Church, does not abuse.

The world may condemn, but Jesus’ body does not condemn.

Peter says, “*To this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.*”

What’s the blessing?

Peace.

If we’ll concentrate on pursuing God’s way of life – if we’ll live as God says to live, somehow God will put all the stuff the world tries to lay on us into context and perspective, and in doing that, He’ll give us a deep, deep peace.

If we’ll live for Him, He’ll supply us with peace.

In verse 12 there, Peter, again quoting David, promises: “*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer...*”

God sees, God knows, what’s going on with His people, and if we’ll live as He calls us to live one with another, He’ll take care of the details.

That’s why the Psalmist, King David, began this whole declaration by saying, “*Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.*”

“Taste and see.”

Give God a try.

Give God’s way a try.

Humble yourself.

You’ll be blessed if you will.

You’ll be blessed with peace.

Even though the world around us rages against us, God’s people will be at peace, both with *each other and with ourselves*.

God will bless us with His otherworldly power to be sympathetic, loving, compassionate and humble.

² | Peter 1:6, 3:16, 5:9

We'll be able to respond to evil with good.
And we'll be able to sleep at night.

And, we'll be a witness for Jesus to the anxious and worried world around us.

Yes, there is evil and wrong and ungodly behavior in our world, and sometimes it's directed at us.

But God's blessing of peace comes to:

Those who will do things His way,

Those who will live as He says to live

Those who will humble themselves and take refuge in Him.

Just as Jesus did on the cross.

In his article in this month's issue of *First Things*, Liel Leibovitz talks about an occasion where he was with a very diverse group of friends: Jews, Catholics and evangelicals, young and old, from university professors to professional musicians. All, he writes, very likely had in common *only* the belief that faith, family, and nation ought to be the building blocks of a happy, fruitful life.

In the midst of the gathering, he turned to them, raised his glass and said, "*Mazal tov* (congratulations)! You're all Jews now."

There was a big laugh, of course, but he was being serious.

He writes, "Growing up in what felt like, just a few years ago, a very different America, my friends gathered there had no way of knowing what life as an embattled minority might feel like. Their beliefs, give or take a few articles of faith, were so common in the public discourse that they hardly needed stating.

But no more.

The values and worldviews that were so common and so unremarkable for so long have become anathema so suddenly. We who hold them now realize that we're all in the same boat, you see?

We're all outsiders.

We're all Jews now.

We're all, now, what Jews have always been.

And though we're bewildered and perplexed, the solution—the path to peace—is also what the solution has always been.

We humble ourselves.

We follow the Lord.

We taste and see that He is good.

We enjoy the blessing of those who live in His ways—those who take refuge in Him: the blessing of peace.

Listen, do you find yourself perpetually tense and anxious?

Are you always trying to defend yourself?

Are you constantly swinging your sword?

Are you trying to control the uncontrollable?

Are you fighting the world?

And have you lost your peace in it all?

You can't keep living there—it will make you crazy.

Take these words of Peter to heart.

Learn what Peter learned.

Learn what King David learned.

Learn what Jesus lived.

Take hold of humility.

"Be unified in purpose and sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing—so that you may inherit a blessing." (1 Peter 3:8-9)

"Keep your tongue from evil—your lips from deceitful speech. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it." (Ps. 34:13)

Closing Prayer:

We come to your table, Jesus, looking for just what Peter says we need in order for peace: unity, sympathy, love, compassion, humility, purity, honesty, and goodness.

Would you meet us here with these, convincing us of our need for them. And where we'll open ourselves, pour them into us, so we might have the blessing of peace, Your peace, in our confused and upended world.

Service of Holy Communion

Closing Song: *Have Faith in God*

Benediction: *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it"* (1 Thess. 5:23-24).