

We said last Sunday night...if there is one thing our world is looking for, it's peace...certainly peace between nations, yes, and between races and between political parties and within families and marriages and all that.

But you know, just as much...if not more...our world desperately seeks **personal** peace. **Inner** peace...peace of **mind**...peace of **heart**.

We talked about this last Sunday night...how everyone has ideas about finding it.

One wise person once wrote, "The path to inner peace begins with just three words: Not. My. Problem."

Someone else said, "To find inner peace, search deep inside yourself. Is there a donut there? If not, take corrective action."

People are looking, not for donuts, but for peace, because everyone is so tight, so tense, so anxious – that's why people are blowing up and popping off and having heart attacks; that's why people are shooting people and using drugs and committing suicide and everything else that we said, last week, is up.

When the pressure inside gets too high, something needs to give.

(Blow Off Valve)

We all need one of these, somewhere, somehow.

Technically this is called a Temperature and Pressure Relief Valve, but we always called it a pop-off valve.

These go on water heaters and hot water or steam boiler systems so that, if something goes haywire...if an internal limit switch fails or something like that...and the pressure inside the tank gets too high, this will open and relieve the pressure...instead of the tank eventually exploding.

All this is where the phrase, "I'm just venting," comes from.

When we rant or complain to a trusted friend, we're "popping off" in a safe environment, so we don't explode somewhere else and really hurt somebody.

But...are there ways to keep the pressure from building up inside us in the first place?

Are there ways to maintain a peaceful, de-pressurized tank, if you will?

These things would be good to know, so we don't have to live with the constant pressurizing and popping off cycles.

What causes pressure within us, besides Mexican food?

We said last week that one thing is a spirit of **unforgiveness**...holding grudges against other people.

The Apostle Paul talks about that with the Colossian church, and how critical it is to our own personal peace to live in a posture of forgiveness...since that is the way of Jesus.

To be Christ is to forgive others, and so to be Christian – to be a disciple of Jesus is to forgive...to let things against others go and not carry them around with us.

We do that out of obedience to Christ, if nothing else. But beyond that, releasing that animosity or bitterness within us toward someone else...getting rid of that poison inside us...is one way that we experience peace.

Now, it may not solve the disagreement...we still may well disagree...but still, forgiveness releases the tension and anxiety and pressure.

That's why we said that forgiving others...and living in a posture of forgiveness is one of a number of highways that lead to peace.

But there are others...other roads to peace that the Bible speaks of, and one of those is...**reconciliation**.

Jesus talks about that in Matthew 5, so, if you would, let's turn there tonight. I'd like to read just a few verses there, beginning in verse 21:

Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You shall not kill, and whoever kills shall be liable to the judgment.' But I tell you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, 'Raca' shall be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'fool!' shall be liable to the fire of hell. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there on the altar and go and be reconciled to your brother first, and then come and offer your gift.

Settle matters quickly with your opponent while you are with him on the way, lest your opponent deliver you to the judge and the judge to the attendant, and you be cast into prison. Truly I tell you...by no means will you get out until you have repaid the last cent."

This is Jesus' call to reconciliation...to be reconciled with those from whom you're separated or estranged.

And as I said, it's another highway to peace...and it's related to forgiveness, but they're not the same.

I can remember my awareness of this passage even from childhood and I remember why I was aware of it: anytime someone talked about the fire of hell...that caught my attention.

You know, you sometimes hear people say that "no one has ever genuinely come to Christ out of fear," or that "fear is not a good motivator for spiritual decisions."

I disagree. Fear, and fear of consequence, can be great motivators to action. Fear should never be the **end** of a person's journey with Jesus, but it can most certainly be the **beginning**.

Like here, for example.

It's perfectly reasonable, and even wise, to fear winding up in hell, apart from God forever.

So if we don't want to end up that way, then, according to Jesus, we have to deal honestly with both any anger that is within us – that is forgiveness – but also...we have to deal with any resulting estrangement from another person that we are holding on to.

In order to be people at peace with God and ourselves, we have deal with both.

Now, let's just admit - we'll never be best buddies with everyone, and I don't believe that's Jesus' expectation.

First of all, because it's just not logistically possible. One can only have so many real friends.

But also, because, the fact is, personalities are different.

In perspective and point of view...we're all different from each other, at least a bit. God made us that way. There are uniquenesses to human life. Individuality. Personality.

Personality existed before the fall. We're not robots who, in our perfect, Christian state, think and act identically.

God doesn't expect us to relate perfectly, as if in unison, to every other person.

But...God **would** have His people be together, even in their differences. To live in harmony with each other. How do you do that? You see people as persons...souls...loved by God, and not just the sum total of their ideologies and opinions.

That's personhood...and it's divine...and God calls us to recognize this.

It's the same reason Christians are pro-life: we value souls.

But you see, it's inconsistent to value the soul of a baby, and then dismiss the soul of an adult simply because we disagree with them in one way or another.

In God's Kingdom...with the help of the Spirit, there is power...there is grace, not just to forgive, but to act on that forgiveness. There is grace to have relationship...restored relationship...to be reconciled in respect and to act in love toward another.

That's the standard that Jesus lays down here for those who would live in His Kingdom.

Toward our brothers and sisters in Christ, followers of Jesus are responsible, not just for forgiveness, but also for taking steps to reconcile...to live in relationship with others...and not just those we, ourselves hold at a distance, but even with those we know who are angry with us.

In other words, wherever there is a breach that we know about, we are responsible to try to repair it.

Now, we're not responsible for how the other person might respond.

But we are responsible to do all we can to make peace.

And...as you might imagine...the normal excuses for not doing this won't work with Jesus.

Excuses like:

"But it's his problem!"

"He's the one who's angry!"

"She's the one who started it!"

Those just don't fly with Jesus.

To those excuses, I think Jesus would say, ***"That's the stuff of elementary school playgrounds...not the stuff of the grown-up citizen of the Kingdom of God."***

In other words, no matter who's fault it is, we're responsible for doing all we can to make it right, and living with that guiding principle is just part of the life and thinking of a peace-filled citizen of Jesus' Kingdom.

And life bears this out, doesn't it?

I mean, doesn't it feel good...isn't it a tremendous relief to know that we've done all we can toward making peace with someone else?

And doesn't conviction get heavy on our hearts when we know we haven't?

Jesus doesn't want His people carrying all that around...so He gives us the way out. He gives us the way of grace here.

Just as God pursues us for the sake of peace between us and Him, so are we to pursue others with that same goal of peace.

Love souls...show grace...make peace. That's Jesus' Kingdom way.

And, we should note that Jesus brings the illustration home here with regard to our own worship of God.

He says here that, basically, no one can, or should, attempt to worship God while knowingly harboring conflict with a brother or sister.

This idea links directly with so many sayings of Jesus, but the one that comes to mind is Jesus' parable in Matthew 18...how the man came and asked how many times he should forgive his brother, and Jesus' response was basically, ***"You should forgive him as much as you expect God to forgive you,"*** because, you see, the attitude of our hearts toward our brothers or sisters affects our relationship with God.

Blessed are the **merciful**, for **they** will be shown mercy.

Jesus says, ***"Hey, don't bother bringing offerings of worship to God when unresolved conflict exists between us and a brother or sister, because outward worship won't work until we've worshipped inwardly...and inward worship is going and making things as right as we can with our brother or sister."***

Our outward worship will be ineffective until that inner work is done.

I think of that verse in 1 John, where John says, "**Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar.**"

Our worship of God is just a sham if we're harboring resentment, or if we're unwilling to be reconciled with someone God loves.

You know, I wonder how much this affects corporate worship...especially in these days. I mean, of course there have always been things for people to disagree about, but over these last couple years...between politics and Covid...I wonder how unresolved conflict and anger in His church is keeping God from blessing His people...and receiving their praise?

And of course, in the corporate sense, lack of reconciliation has the potential to, not just affect the offending people, but also all the rest who are trying to worship together.

Discord in one person's life can affect lots of people.

That's just the nature of sin, right? No matter how hidden we try to keep it...no matter how individualized we think it is, sin always seems to bleed into other people and places.

With that in mind, may I say, if you're having trouble connecting with God in a corporate way...if you don't sense the Holy Spirit in corporate worship, it may not be a problem with the usual things people tend to blame, like the temperature of the room or the service time or the preaching or the music or whatever.

The problem may be that there's reconciliation that needs to happen in your life that you've been unwilling to do. It may be that you've been unwilling to see some person in your life as a soul that Jesus loves...a soul for whom He died.

And not only will that affect your ability to worship, that will keep you from experiencing peace.

If you think that could be you...and only God knows if it is, can I just say, please...do whatever He's calling you to do about reconciliation so that log-jam in your life might be broken up.

I might also mention that a person who won't reconcile affects that person's individual worship too.

When we quiet ourselves before God in order to do our devotions...to read His word or pray...in that moment, God speaks to us, in that quiet way that He does, about going to see this person or that person.

Is that happening with you?

And, you know, I don't know about you, but with me, He often just brings their face right up in my mind, and I know it's God doing it because it's usually the last person in the world that I'd expect to just think about.

In fact, the truth is, I didn't really **want** to think about them, and yet God lays this thought on my heart to be reconciled...to go and show kindness.

Has that ever happened to you?

What is that? That's His grace, right? He's trying to repair something so we can draw closer to Him.

I wonder how many people don't do devotions for fear that God might ask something like that of them.

I wonder how many people's devotional lives are really just very superficial because of their unwillingness to reconcile with a brother or sister.

I wonder if some people have lived whole lifetimes feeling distant from God because they weren't willing to obey this very foundational word of Jesus here that relates relationship with one another to relationship with God.

That's really what Jesus is doing here. He's directly relating the horizontal relationships in our lives with the vertical relationship, because only when those are all what they should be will we find peace.

Reconciliation...both vertical and horizontal – with God and with others...that's the way of Kingdom life that brings peace.

You know, I should mention too, just quickly here, that Jesus doesn't leave this as a practice just between his followers. His followers are actually to be known for this in their relationships with those who **don't** follow Jesus too.

In verse 25 there, Jesus says to settle matters, and quickly, with your adversary while on the way to court.

We assume this is about non-believers because believers are never to let things get that far; they're never to let secular courts settle things for them. Paul talks about the sad ridiculousness of that in 1 Corinthians 6.

But sometimes a person who doesn't know Jesus **will** take us to court and so Jesus says to go to that person too and deal with that issue quickly, before it goes too far, because that sort of reconciliation also leads to peace.

Even if that other person totally rejects your effort, you will still experience that peace that comes when we know we've done all we can...we've tried as hard as possible to make and keep peace.

And we all know the truth of this, don't we?

The longer we let things sit and boil, the hotter and hotter they get, and the anxiety within us grows and grows. We've all tried this, because, on the surface, it seems easier in the moment to not deal with conflict and keep putting it off.

Yet sooner or later, the conflict must be handled, and the later we wait, almost always, the harder it is...and the more damage has been done.

Jesus says, "Deal with things now...before you attempt to worship...before hard situations get harder and eventually get out of hand."

That's reconciliation.

It's the way of Christ...and...it's one of His highways to real, personal peace.

Will you take it?

Will you follow Jesus to reconciliation...and to that peace that your missing?

Closing Song