

April 30, 2006  
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene  
"Peace Be With You."

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**John 14:1a, 6-7,9b,15-17a,18,20-21,23,27 (NLT)**

**"Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me.**

**6 Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. 7 If you had known who I am, then you would have known who my Father is. From now on you know him and have seen him!"**

**9b Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!**

**15 "If you love me, obey my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, who will never leave you. 17 He is the Holy Spirit,**

**18 No, I will not abandon you as orphans--I will come to you.**

**20 When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. 21 Those who obey my commandments are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them, and I will love them. And I will reveal myself to each one of them."**

**23 Jesus replied, "All those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and live with them.**

**27 "I am leaving you with a gift--peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give isn't like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid.**

I couldn't get something from last week's Scripture out of my mind. After the resurrection, when Jesus suddenly appeared to His disciples, the first thing He said to them was, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19 NLT)

There are a few basic things that seem to be desired by virtually every person on earth. One of those is peace. I think you'd be hard pressed to find anyone who doesn't long for peace. Even people whose job is to make war often talk about wanting peace. We long for peace in society. We long for peace in our own relationships. Most of all we long for a sense of inner peace.

But as much as we want it, isn't it amazing how elusive peace is? We may have pockets of it here and there, but trying to maintain peace is kind of like trying to nail Jello to a tree. It's hard to keep it where you want it.

No doubt you've experienced this. You get things managed in your life pretty well, the road smooths out, it seems like things might be peaceful for a while. You breathe out – aaagh! And just then something unexpected happens, your stomach goes back in knots and peace is shattered. It's hard to keep hold of peace.

You may remember back in 1983 when Korean airlines flight 007 was shot down over Soviet air space killing all 240 passengers on board? I just read the rest of that story. It seems that a Major Osipovich, an air force pilot for the former USSR, planned to give a talk at his children's school about peace. But he would need time off during the day to give his talk, so he volunteered for night duty. That's how the major found himself patrolling the skies over the eastern regions of the Soviet Union on September 1, 1983--the night the Korean airliner strayed into Soviet air space. Soon the soviet pilot was caught in a series of blunders and misinformation. In the end, Major Osipovich followed orders and shot down the unidentified aircraft. All he was trying to do was to be available to talk some school children about peace. Instead he became entangled in events that sparked an international incident that pushed world powers to a stand-off.

Some time ago now, the great film star, Harrison Ford, was being interviewed. The interviewer noted that he had been in more successful films, won more awards, and made more money than just about anyone in Hollywood. The reporter said, "Mr. Ford you seem to have everything. What's left? Is there anything that you still want?" Harrison Ford got kind of a faraway look in his eyes and then he said, "yes, there is one thing – peace."

Now we who are Christians, followers of Jesus Christ believe that we have an answer to that dilemma. We know that Jesus Christ is the true source of peace. When I first believed in Jesus and asked Him into my heart one of the first things I experienced was peace, like I had never known before.

We have the answer to the world's quest for peace. What great news! But has anyone else noticed that very often, even for Christians, real peace seems as elusive as it ever was? Why is that? If Jesus Christ is the true source of peace then why aren't we a lot more peace-filled? And if peace is part of the fruit of the Spirit who indwells us, then why does it seem that peace so often escapes God's people? I think Jesus gives us an answer to that question in the passage we've read together this morning.

We dropped right into the middle of a very intense conversation that Jesus was having with his disciples. Things are coming to a close very quickly in terms of their time together. Jesus is giving them final instructions, trying to help them hold steady through what is about to happen, namely His crucifixion. He is sharing with them how it is they can keep going with the mission of announcing the kingdom of God to the world without Him there. So he tells them of the Holy Spirit who will come and fill their hearts with His love and His power. The Spirit will teach them everything they need to know. The Spirit will enable them to speak even when they are threatened. The Spirit will support them and comfort them. And the Spirit will give them peace. There it is. That beautiful promise of God's peace spoken with authority and certainty by Jesus.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” We love that verse. We love that promise. And we know that it’s true. Those of us who have truly opened our hearts to the lordship of Jesus Christ have indeed experienced the peace of God that passes all understanding.

That’s all wonderful. But these disciples were puzzled about what Jesus was really saying, and soon they would be scared to death at how God was bringing this all to pass. What these disciples needed to know and what we need to know even today, is how the promise of peace can last in our hearts. Is it possible that peace doesn’t have to be so elusive? Is there a way that peace can be the regular experience of my life? There is a way. But we’ll need to be open enough to hear the answer.

You see Jesus’ promise of peace comes in the midst of a long conversation about obedience. This is an “if-then” passage. Throughout this teaching Jesus is saying to his disciples: “If you want this result, then this is what you must embrace.” (Notice verses 15, 21, 23). [Ps 119:165 Those who love your law have great peace...]

In the midst of all that talk about obedience to the will of God, that’s when Jesus promises His peace. There is a profound connection between peace and obedience. “If you want peace, then you must obey my commands. If you want peace, then you must abide in my word. If you want peace, then you must align your life to my teaching.”

Peace comes from trusting Jesus, really trusting Him. We trust those we love and so we obey those we love and trust.

Problem is, it seems that very often we want the peace without the obedience. We want to experience this wonderful rest of spirit, but we sometimes aren’t very willing to look at why it eludes us.

I have this experience fairly regularly in my pastoral conversations with people. Someone will say, “Oh my life is in turmoil, it’s in chaos. I’m anxious and worried and I can’t sleep at night. I just need God to give me peace.” But then we begin to unpack and look at the circumstances of their lives and the choices they are making and I want to say, “Well what do you expect!?”

When you ignore biblical principles of how relationships are to be handled, don’t expect to have peace. If you refuse to align your life with kingdom values, don’t expect peace. If you are praying for peace or seeking peace in your life, but are not willing to fully align your life with the scriptures, your prayer will not be answered.

It’s like taking a test at school. You can pray for hours that God will help you on that test, but unless you align your life to the truth of study and discipline and understanding the facts, your prayer won’t be worth much. Like the young boy who after taking a test

prayed, “Oh God, please make Rome the capital of France.” If you are begging God for peace but there is unforgiveness in your heart toward another person, peace will elude you because you are not following the clear command of Jesus to forgive. If you are pleading with God for peace on Sunday, but Monday through Saturday you’re chasing the dreams and values of this world, peace will elude you because you are aligning your life to the values of the kingdom.

It’s a very simple equation. If you want the peace that Jesus gives, live in the truth. That’s what makes Christianity different from other religions. It seems that in many religious systems the goal is some vague idea of peace or well-being, not so with Christianity. The goal is Jesus. The goal is being like him in mind and spirit, and peace is result of that Christlikeness.

Corrie ten Boom, the dear sister who spent years in Hitler’s concentration camps, said, “I looked on Jesus and the dove of peace entered my heart. I looked at the dove of peace; and lo...off he went. Jesus said, “If you love me you will obey my teaching. And my Father will love and we will come to make our home with you. There’s how to know peace. The Spirit of truth, the Comforter, the Counselor will only fully dwell with those who obey the teaching of Jesus.

Jesus said, “I do not give as the world gives.” The peace that Jesus gives is no quick-fix peace. It’s not a medicated peace. It’s not a negotiated peace. It’s not peace without price. The peace that Jesus gives is a peace that comes to an obedient and loving heart. Do you need some peace today? Are you hungry for the kind of peace that Jesus could give? Let me ask you some questions:

Are you seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness or (if you’re really honest) are putting more energy into seeking the kingdom of this world? Are you abiding in Christ daily? Are you spending quality time in his presence, feeding on his Word and being renewed by his Spirit in prayer? Are you regularly engaged in acts of service? Are you loving your neighbor as yourself? Are you spending your best resources and energies on your own comfort or for the sake of others? Are your relationships with others characterized by grace and love and forgiveness? Or are they characterized by suspicion, bitterness, gossip, and disdain?

Do you get the point? If you long to know what it is to live in a spirit of rest and peace, don’t just pray that somehow God will drop peace on you. It doesn’t work like that. Pray that God will make you fully obedient to the teachings of Jesus. Pray that your heart and life will be transformed by the renewing of your mind in Christ Jesus. Pray that God will give you grace to make the hard choices of aligning your life to the truth of the gospel – even the hard truth of the gospel.

The peace that Jesus gives is deep and lasting. It is not elusive. It is not fragile. But it does not come by wishing for it. It comes by obedience to the word of God.