

and a little child shall lead them.

7 The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

**9 They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.**

I enjoyed watching *A Charlie Brown Christmas* this past week. It is a classic. I have more than a few *Peanuts* books at home. One *Peanuts* cartoon has Lucy saying to Charlie Brown,

"I hate everything. I hate everybody. I hate the whole wide world!"

Charlie Brown says, *"But I thought you had inner peace."*

Lucy replies, *"I do have inner peace. But I still have outer obnoxiousness."*

Needless to say, if we have outer obnoxiousness, agitation, anxiety, anger, fears, even violence, there may be a need for us to have more of Jesus' peace in our lives.

Many years ago, a man named Thomas a Kempis wrote about the fact that we will never have peace in our life or home, our relationships or the world, if we are not at peace ourselves. *"First keep the peace within yourself, then you can also bring peace to others. A peaceful and patient man is of more profit to himself and to others, too, than a learned man who has no peace."*

If we are not at peace with God and with ourselves, it shouldn't surprise us if we are more like Lucy than Thomas a Kempis. We cannot share with others what we do not possess ourselves. This is especially true of peace.

The dictionary has many definitions for peace including those describing agreements between nations, public order, harmony in personal relations, and freedom from fear. Peace is a very significant word in the Bible. God's desire is for people to be **at peace** with their Creator, other people, and the rest of creation. This is expressed in Genesis the first book of the Bible, in prophets like Isaiah, and in the birth and life of Jesus we celebrate at Christmas. In John 14:27, Jesus said, **"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.**

I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Peace is what Jesus wishes to give to his friends. Passages in the New Testament frequently use peace as a virtual synonym for the gospel, summing up all the benefits that the coming of Jesus brought to humanity.

When Peter summed up the gospel in Acts 10, peace is at the heart of his proclamation. *“You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, preaching **peace by Jesus Christ** – he is Lord of all (10:36).”*

Many people seem to lack a sense of peace today and wonder how to have it. An answer in a word is **acceptance**. Acceptance of the fact that the people around us aren't perfect, life isn't perfect, and neither are we. As much as we may have been disappointed or hurt by people, we also have hurt and disappointed others. Maybe not in the same way or to the same degree, but we have. Being at peace begins with accepting this lack of perfection, this lack of everything being ideal. Truly being at peace, as a Christian, comes through our full acceptance of and obedience to Jesus that gives us true peace with God and ourselves.

It is interesting to note that surrounding Jesus there was almost constant turmoil: demanding crowds, eager supporters, critical and dangerous opponents, demonic activity, and stormy seas. Within Jesus there was a peace and calm he projected which attracted others to him. **Peace is both a gift of God and a fruit of the Spirit for us to cultivate.** With our nation fighting wars in two nations, and violence all over the globe, at Christmas time, **we remember that Jesus was born and came to bring peace on earth and once we have received the peace of Christ, we have a responsibility for living in peace and being instruments of God's peace.** The Hebrew and Greek words for “peace” are “shalom” and “eirene” (eye-RAY-nay). These words are active, positive words, communicating much of what we desire in life: health, security, long life, harmonious relationships with other people, and blessing.

There are approximately 250 uses of shalom in the OT. One of the church's favorite titles for Jesus comes from Isaiah 9:6, *“And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Shalom.”* Eirene appears about **90 times in the Greek NT. It is more common than the words “gospel,” “joy” or “hope.”** The angels use it to announce the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:14), *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace (eirene).”* Eirene becomes part of the standard greeting and closing blessing of most letters in the New Testament. Romans 1:7 for example, *“Grace to you and peace (eirene) from God our Father and the*

Lord Jesus Christ.” In Colossians, Paul tells us how reconciliation and peace come through the cross.

*“For in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by **making peace** through the blood of the cross.”* Colossians 1:20

Making peace was painful for Jesus, and it can be painful today – from the most personal level all the way up to between nations. Many times I have listened to good women and men who have agonized over the decision to have to place their mother or father or spouse in a nursing home because their parents or loved one needed more care than they could give. It is often a difficult decision even when we know it is the right thing to do because we have done all we can.

Back in 1979 when my grandfather was diagnosed with a brain tumor we immediately moved my grandparents into our home. My grandfather died 6 months later, but my grandmother lived with us for another 9 years until we simply couldn't keep her at home. Even with me moving home from seminary housing to help - with my parents work schedules, and my classes, she simply would have been home too long alone. Many of you understand about making decisions like this and we have to learn to **make peace with it** and accept it.

There are so many situations, disappointments, and heartaches that may weigh on us, bother us, torment us, or bug us that we may need to **make peace with** so we can get on with life. Each us can think of what it is for us. One thing we do know, being a follower of Jesus *does not* exempt us from storms in life, but we can have peace in the midst of the storms that arise during our journey.

Friday night I was texting back and forth with one of our friends, a young man who stayed us while playing for the Brewster Whitecaps in the Cape Cod Baseball League. He sent me a message to say he was in Boston and he and his girlfriend were trying to fly out to California, but their flight had been delayed five hours. It was near time to board and he wrote, *“You can't even see the runway at the airport, we're about to board now, good thing we have an exit row in case we need to leave in a hurry.”* Catherine Marshall shared of an experience her friend had aboard a plane bound for Cleveland, but still waiting for takeoff. As she settled into her seat, Marge noticed a strange phenomenon. On one side of the airplane a sunset suffused the entire sky with glorious color. But out of the window next to her seat, all Marge could see was a sky dark and threatening, with no sign of the sunset.

As the plane's engines began to roar, a gentle voice spoke within her. "You have noticed the windows. Your life, too, will contain some happy beautiful times, but also some dark shadows. Here's a lesson I want to teach you to save you some heartache and allow you to abide in me with **continual peace** and joy. You see it doesn't matter which window you look through; this plane is still going to Cleveland. So it is in your life. You have a choice. You can dwell on the gloomy picture. Or you can focus on the bright things and leave the dark, ominous situations to me. I alone can handle them anyway. And the final destination is not influenced by what you see or feel along the way. Learn this, act on it and you will be released, **able to experience the "peace that passes understanding."**¹ No disrespect, but fortunately most of us *are not* going to Cleveland, but we do have a choice about where we will focus our attention and whether we will seek to be people of peace.

World War Two US General Omar N. Bradley said:

"Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount."

We know that war continues to be a reality in our world, but even from the horror of war waged by people, God can often work to bring healing and hope. On Friday night in naming their persons of the year ABC news recognized Dr's Vince and Vance Moss, twin brothers and US Army reserves, surgeons, who felt led to help take care of many with severe needs. The US state dept. told them it was a suicide mission for them to go, but they went to Afghanistan anyway after hiring their own security and buying their own supplies. They performed surgeries and helped people in all kinds of rudimentary places, even a cave. Then when they were sent to Iraq, they wanted to help some of the civilians they saw, especially the children, but they were told their orders and mission didn't allow it. So, once home in the US, they arranged for an Iraqi girl they had met with a critical bladder issue to come to the States, treated her, she is doing much better. These were just a few examples of their service which helps to take a few stones off the wall of hostility between people from different nations and cultures.

In explaining who Jesus is and what his death on the cross means for all people, Paul writes in Ephesians 2:14-17, "For he is our **peace**; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has **broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us**. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might

¹ Catherine Marshall in *Touching the Heart of God*. Christianity Today, vol. 39, #6.

create in himself, one new humanity in place of the two, thus **making peace**, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and **proclaimed peace** to those who were far off and **peace** to those who were near.”

Thomas Merton wrote, *“If you are yourself **at peace**, then there is at least some peace in the world. Then share your peace with everyone, and everyone will be at peace.”*

If you long for peace in your own life, it begins with acceptance of the imperfections and disappointments of life and making peace with yourself, and receiving the peace that God gives us in Jesus.

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas and the birth of Jesus who came to bring peace on earth, I leave you with the purpose statement of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America which says:

“We are called by God to witness to the **Gospel of Peace**. This calling is rooted in our faith in **Jesus Christ, who is our Peace**, in whom God is reconciling the world, and through whom God calls us to **the ministry of peacemaking**. **Peace** is not only our goal, but our means. The foundation of **peace** is justice. The force of **peace** is love. We believe the ministry of reconciliation is at the heart of Christian discipleship. Peacemaking is more than an issue - it is our calling and vocation as followers of Jesus.”

May we be instruments of peace in our families, communities, and the world this Christmas season.

Blessing:

“Live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”

2 Corinthians 13:11