

August 23, 2020  
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Philippians 4:4-9      Stop Being Nice: Be Peaceful  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Philippians 4:4-9      New Revised Standard Version

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

The church is a funny place. We have funny names for things. Instead of a foyer we call it a narthex. Instead of a stage we call it an altar. Instead of an audience, you are the congregation. When we dip the bread into the juice at communion we call that intinction. We sing the doxology after the offering. Doxology means a song to praise God. We shake hands with people and tell them, “The peace of Christ be with you.” What are we actually saying when we say “The peace of Christ be with you”? What does it mean to have the peace of Christ with you? When we look to the Bible, we find that Biblical peace is rooted in shalom. Shalom means peace but so much more. It means finding harmony between people and creating community and wholeness. Peace is to have and share the mindset of Christ.

We have been talking this month about moving beyond being nice toward kindness, joy, peace, and love. As Christians we are called to imitate Christ by seeking peace. There are people that we know of who actively sought peace in their lives, people like Martin Luther King Jr. His dream was for a society which would not judge children, “by the color of our skin but by the content of our character.” King challenged us to take on the mind of Christ and put it into action. We’re all challenged to a new frame of reference for peace as we strive to bring about a society of shalom and justice.

God has a clear vision of peace. In scripture when people say that they are seeking peace, they are seeking shalom. They are seeking wholeness, community, and belonging for all. God’s peace looks like strength under control. In the Philippians passage Paul says, “Let your gentleness be known to everyone.” It is not returning violence for violence. It is gentleness, it is peace, it is building bridges instead of tearing them down.

Paul was writing to a church that was having conflict. Hard to imagine, I know. Paul reminds them everything that is excellent or praiseworthy comes from God. Then Paul assures them that they will have peace and that peace comes from God. It is a reminder that God is with us.

I remember years ago visiting an older gentleman in the hospital. His prognosis wasn’t good and he was in really serious condition. We visited for a while and then I asked him what he wanted to pray for. He said, “peace on earth.” I first I thought he was joking, but he wasn’t. He explained that he was not long for this world, but that he prayed every day for God’s peace to be felt by everyone in the world.

We will find peace when we fill our minds with the things of Christ. Yes, it is beyond our understanding, but whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, may we think about these things. How can you bring God’s peace into your world today? I was throwing some things away this week in the church dumpster and Russell Faulhaber saw me outside. It was so good to see him! I miss seeing you all so much! Russell shared with me that he had left his house and been inside a building

with other people seven times since March. It is such a weird time! But every day he goes for a mile and a half walk and it is good. How can you bring God's peace into your world today?

It's hard not to worry, even when we know that worrying won't add any hours to our life. As Jesus reminds us in Matthew 6:34, "Therefore, stop worrying about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." We worry about the older people around us, we worry about children, we worry about teachers and school staff. So many things right now are hard. We come from a place of frustration and anxiety and we fear what our children, schools and neighborhoods are losing. It feels like there is a blanket of anxiety that rests on our community and we cannot lift it alone. So, what can I do? I can be kind to myself and to others, I can share joy, I can share peace. What can we do to ease the anxiety of this stressful time? What can we do to ease the anxiety of those we love?

God has taken such exquisite care over creation, why would we not believe that God cares for us as well? The same God who made the lilies of the field and the birds of the air and has infinite capacity to care for us, that same God gives us hope in the midst of worry.

The crucial thing for us to remember about peace is that it is not the absence of conflict. Peace is an action which requires us to seek justice and harmony. Peace requires us to act. Peace is a verb. We must take actions to be peaceful. It is the mind of Christ in action. We have to put peace into practice. Paul says in the Philippians passage, "Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you."

God wants you to be a peacemaker. God makes me to be a peacemaker. God wants all of us to be peacemakers in our divided world. First, have the mind of Christ. Put it into practice and the peace of Christ will be with you. What would Jesus do? Peace is an action as we conform our minds to Christ and then act.

This week, let's commit to be peacemakers in our community. Our teachers and children are going back to school or preparing to go back to school. Can you make a card that says "put on the mind of Christ" or "peace"? Hang your card from your refrigerator or on your bathroom mirror. We need something we will see every day to remind us to have the peace of Christ.

As all our minds are conformed to Christ and we begin to act, the world around us will change. Peace doesn't just change us, it brings shalom, wholeness, community for all. May we all work toward justice and peace as we spread shalom, wholeness, wellness, peace, and justice for all, especially the oppressed.

There is a song that you sometimes hear at Christmas time and all week it has been floating in my head. Peace, peace, peace on earth and good will to all. This is a time for joy. This is a time for love. Now let us all sing together of peace, peace, peace on earth. May it be so today, Amen.