

"God's Peace"

Dr. Rich Knight

December 5, 2010

Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

John 14:25-27

"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 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."

On this day when we light the Candle of Peace, I'd like to speak to you briefly this morning on the subject of Peace. Peace is a huge topic in the Bible. The Biblical word for peace is that marvelous word, Shalom. If you've been in church for a few years I'm sure you've heard a preacher say that peace in the Bible is not merely the absence of strife. Shalom is much more than that. It's harmony, wholeness, unity, justice. It's when life and relationships are complete and sound.

As I was thinking about this subject this week, I came to realize that we learn about peace by seeing it in others.

Mary

I have a friend named Mary who has made peace the focus of her life. It's the virtue she cherishes the most, and strives for the most, and embodies the most. She meditates and prays, and does yoga and spends a great deal of time out in nature - all to cultivate a spirit of peace.

Peace within.

Peace with God.

Peace with others.

Peace with the world.

Peace for the world.

Peace with creation, with nature.

Inner peace, spiritual peace, interpersonal peace, world peace.

Mary thinks about peace the way Jerry Seinfeld thinks about being funny, which is to say, all the time! Mary thinks about peace like Bill Belichick thinks about football. Mary thinks about peace the way a Golden Retriever thinks about its owner. Mary wants to be owned by peace. What a wonderful virtue to have as the focal point of your life.

Charlie

I had another friend names Charlie who taught me about peace. Charlie probably wouldn't have described himself as terribly religious. But he had made the faith his own.

Charlie died several years ago. A few days before he died his family gathered around his hospital bed. They were all there, summoned if you will, by the seriousness of his condition. He looked up at their very sad faces and said, "You know, nothing bad's gonna happen here." He died at peace. He truly rested in peace.

You know, studies have shown that religious people handle dying better. For Christians it's because Christ has offered us the gift of peace with God. Romans 5:1 says, *"Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* St. Paul wrote this to the Ephesians: *"Christ himself is our peace"* (Eph. 2:14).

The Bible has this view that the world is in rebellion against God. World history and the evening news seem to confirm this opinion. There's a cosmic rebellion against a Creator who longs for "Peace on earth. Goodwill among men and women." And Christ came to lead an end to the rebellion by offering us Heaven's peace.

Remember years ago you used to hear this statement, *"Those who make the wars should fight them."* I think it was a peace slogan from the 1960s. World leaders should just have a boxing match to decide the outcomes of wars. Well, God didn't make war against us. But humans have been estranged from God, according to the Bible. We're part of this mutiny against divinity. And God, the ultimate world leader, came to us in Jesus . . . to make peace. *"Christ himself is our peace."* *"Peace I leave you. My peace I give to you."*

Charlie experienced that peace fully.
Mary strives to live in that peace daily.

My Sons

My sons taught me about peace, whenever we went to the Bugaboo Creek Steakhouse. When they were younger I took them there on special occasions, and that place scared them. There was the talking pine tree when you first walk in. And fish suddenly start flapping and raccoons pop up from time to time. But what really got them was the talking Buffalo. When you're 4 years old that thing must look huge. Whenever it would start talking they would get out of their seats and sit on my lap. And when they were sitting on my lap, they could then look up at the talking Buffalo and almost enjoy him by the end of the meal. Their sense of security, safety and peace came from me, their father. It was as if I was saying to them, "I'm at peace with this talking buffalo. My peace I give to you." And they got it. I think that's a beautiful image of what prayer is - climbing into God's lap. Being held by our Creator, and hearing those words, "My peace I give you."

Bill

There's one other person I want to tell you about who taught me a lot about peace. His name is Bill. He's a pastor, but don't hold that against him. He's a really good pastor. Bill & I pastored churches in Pennsylvania that were right across the street from each other. It was called the *"Valley of the Twin Churches."*

We both came to these churches right out of seminary, filled with energy, confidence and a desire to do well. We had a great friendship and helped each other a lot, especially that first year - the first Christmas, the first Holy Week, the first church crisis - all sorts of things. In our 2nd year Bill & I had a conflict. Our two churches shared some common land, and the church I served wanted to divide up the land. You would have thought we were talking about the West Bank in Israel, because the two sides sometimes fought like it was the Holy Land. Bill fought hard for his church. I fought hard for my church, both of us trying to prove our competence and leadership skills. Outside of the meetings, we barely talked to each other for several months. It was awful. Every day I'd come to church. I'd see his car in his parking lot. He'd see my car in our parking lot. But not a word between us.

It was Christmas Eve, a busy day for pastor. Bill called - *"Wanna come over and see our sanctuary?"* "Sure," I replied. Afterward I invited him to come see ours. As we finished I said, *"Bill, I'm sorry for the tension between us. I've been trying a little too hard. And I'm sorry. You're such a good friend."* He accepted my apology and offered his. We talked for quite awhile about it. As we finished I said, "I'm sorry to bring this up on Christmas Eve. I know it's a crazy day." Bill said something I've never forgotten. He said, *"What better day, than the day of reconciliation."*

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself." Christ came as the Prince of Peace, and what better way to celebrate that than reconciling with a friend.

These are some of the people in my life who have taught me about peace. I'll bet you have people in your life who have done the same thing for you. Let us be those kind of people.

Jesus said, *"Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called the sons and daughters of God."*

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with us. Amen.