

Memorize & Ponder

**Brentwood Presbyterian Church
November 10, 2013**

A Peace that Passes Understanding

**Philippians 4:4-7
(721, 732, 736, 750)**

I don't pretend to understand
the complexities of war in our times.

I'm not confident those who wage war
understand it any better.

I do know it's not a video game.

Real people get maimed and mutilated.
Real people, on both sides, die.
Real families are deprived of loved ones.
Real veterans are denied the care they need and deserve.
Real social costs, all around, are incurred.
Real dollars are spent on high-price weaponry
and taken away from veterans' services.

War, in a word, is hell.

Yet it continues and escalates.

What I think this passage addresses
is where peace begins.

This I can begin to understand.

It begins with God,
flows to each and every one of us
who consent to follow God
into our full, flourishing humanity,
and then flows through us to the world
through our circles of influence.

Listen again for the flow of peace in this passage:

*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,
that passes all understanding,
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

Let's unpack this flow a bit.

It begins in rejoicing
and the focus of the rejoicing is Jesus, the Christ.
We are filled with joy
because of what the compassion of God has done for us
in the work and witness of Jesus,
God's chosen means of reviving in us his original intention
for our flourishing.

This is all done with gentleness.
We are not dragged or drugged into this way of being.
It's an invitation.
It's a possibility filled with benefits that is offered.
To enjoy it,
we have but to consent, to accept, to agree.

What results from that consent
is a deep confidence in the nearness of God,
in the conviction that nothing in all creation
can separate us from the compassion of God we see in Jesus.
This realized hope is the ground of all our courage and compassion.
This is the true and lasting source of peace
within us, around us, and throughout the world.

From the confidence flowing from this kind of consent
arises a courageous love that casts our fear.
Through our intimate conversations with God in prayer,
we understand afresh and more deeply
God's sweet desire for our well-being.

That is our peace, God's peace,
flowing through us into the world
in companionship with all others who are in the touch with it.

I don't think this peace is *beyond* our understanding.
We can be grasped by it through God's grace.
But I do think it passes our understanding
by constantly calling us forth, provoking us,
to move past our current understanding of God's will
and discover new ways of building peace in our time.

It was as a student in the 1960s
that I learned about and began to respect
the non-violent movement for social change.
For me, it was embodied in Martin Luther King, Jr.,
a black Baptist minister who refused to be demeaned and dismissed.
That refusal was grounded in the prophetic traditions of the Scriptures,
where this peace of God we've been exploring
found such eloquent witness.
Some of that eloquence rubbed off on Martin,
as you can hear in these words
from his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in 1964.

I accept this award today with an abiding faith in America and an audacious faith in the future of mankind. I refuse to accept despair as the final response to the ambiguities of history. I refuse to accept the idea that the "isness" of man's present nature makes him morally incapable of reaching up for the eternal "oughtness" that forever confronts him. I refuse to accept the idea that man is mere flotsom and jetsom in the river of life, unable to influence the unfolding events which surround him. I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality.

I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into the hell of thermonuclear destruction. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. I believe that even amid today's mortar bursts and whining bullets, there is still hope for a brighter tomorrow. I believe that wounded justice, lying prostrate on the blood-flowing streets of our nations, can be lifted from this dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of men. I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits. I believe that what self-centered men have torn down men other-centered can build up. I still believe that one day mankind will bow before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and nonviolent redemptive good will proclaim the rule of the land. "And the lion and the lamb shall lie down together and every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree and none shall be afraid." I still believe that We Shall overcome!

His refusals arise from his beliefs
and his beliefs are grounded in the God
who inspired and continues to deliver on
the promises in our sermon text this morning.

But here's an important thing to take away from this morning.

Peace begins with God and us,
with our confidence in God's confidence in us.
It begins with God's compassion that casts our fear.
It begins with God's courage,
seen in human form in Jesus, the Christ,
that witnesses to the dignity and worth of every human being
and the sacred trust we have been given to care for the earth.
It begins with the acts of kindness and compassion
that flow from that confidence and courage,
one act after another.

And act after act,
with the Spirit's help,
our understanding of God's peace
grows and deepens and broadens.

*May God fill you with the Spirit of LAFter this week,
with the joy of love, aspiration, and faith,
as you go forth to bless the world.*

Written and delivered by The Rev. Dr. Brian Fraser, Brentwood Presbyterian Church, Burnaby, BC