

Sermon ✝ May 29, 2022

John 14:23-29

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The young man never knew peace. He was born into a cursed environment. His parents married young, when in fact, they should never have married at all. They reminded him continually that he was the reason they stayed together. Every day, just as regularly as darkness gives way to light, his parents fought, cursed and hated.

Year after year, he prayed for a better life. Finally, he quit praying and he started actively seeking peace on his own. He tried to find peace in drugs, but they only scared him. He tried to find comfort in his friends, but even his best ones weren't always around. He traveled the country, spending time in bars and in churches all over . . . just looking for peace. The more he traveled the further away peace seemed to be. Late one Saturday night he ended his search. The note he left behind simply said, *"I'm looking for peace."*

His nightmare reminds us of the words of Jeremiah, *"Peace, peace, but there is no peace."* I would like to carry on the legacy of the young man and the question he asked. Though he is not here, the question he posed still is, *"Where do we find peace?"*

In the Bible, peace is a thread that runs throughout its holy pages. The Old Testament word for peace is *shalom*. In Hebrew, it is used to convey a message of wholeness and well-being. The psalmist noted that God will *"speak peace to his people, to his saints, those who turn to him in their hearts."*

Peace is a gift of God. Contrary to popular myth peace is not the absence of trouble. Rather it is the ability to cope with any circumstance . . . knowing that God's gift of serenity can be ours.

St. Augustine wrote, *"Thou hast touched me and I have been transformed into thy peace."*

In the New Testament, *shalom* is replaced with *eirene*, the Greek word for peace. [It denotes an *attitude . . . a state of mind.*] Out of the largeness of this word, the answer to the cry of the young man is found.

*"Where do we find peace?"* God's peace is found inside. God's peace is a feeling of peacefulness and rest. The ability to achieve peace is found relationally with God and with others.

A young wife and mother lost her husband in a tragic accident. The insurance settlement was inadequate. She lost the house. Her family was torn apart. Yet, in the midst of her troubles, she remained calm, poised and full of faith. When asked how she could do it she responded, *"The chaos is around me, not within me."*

The child of God responds to all adversity, conflict, and strife by acknowledging the peace of God within.

Some time back, two artists were asked to paint a portrait of *peace*.

The first artist drew a breathtaking pastoral scene with rolling hills, majestic mountains, a quiet lake . . . with not a ripple, and a beautiful blue sky. Unveiling his painting, the artist proudly proclaimed, "*This is peace!*"

The second artist painted a similar setting, but with different conditions. The sky was black, full of angry clouds. Trees were bent by violent winds. The lake was choppy and treacherous. But . . . in the foreground was a small bird, cuddled securely in its nest, going on with its life . . . as if the storm were not there. Said the second artist, "*There, this is real peace.*"

God's people recognize that peace is an internal and eternal quality. It is a lasting and needed gift . . . given to us by a loving God.

In this world of terrorism, hatred, and darkness . . . peace is God's gift to us. It is the peace that passes all understanding. Peace is internal and lasting, but it is also reconciliation with God.

As long as we remain hostile or angry with God, we will never know peace of mind, heart, soul or body. God wants us to be in relationship with one another . . . not separated. That is the classic definition of sin. Sin is separation from God.

It was Thomas à Kempis who wrote, "*All desire peace . . . but very few desire the things that make for peace.*"

In his searching, the young man I spoke of at the beginning, greatly desired the gift of peace, but he was never able to receive it. Part of the condition we call sin is our inability to accept gifts from God.

God stands in the turmoil of our world and lives and offers to us the gift of peace. Sadly, many reject it. When God is our enemy, peace cannot be found.

It was in the cross of Christ that peace became a possibility for us all. Through that singular act. We have been reconciled with God for all time. Reconciled. Re-connected. To become friends again.

God calls all believers to be ambassadors of peace. We are brothers and sisters. We are children of God. We are friends.

The words of the young man do bear repeating. Though he is unable to speak them himself, his question deserves an answer. "*Where do we find peace?*"

Peace is found only in God. The words of the young man become the words of all of us.

We toss and turn at night, depressed and alone . . . fearful and torn because we cannot find peace in our hearts, homes, or world. Peace gently invites us to know God in the person of God's son. The one who has given to us his legacy of love and his legacy of peace.

*“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you . . . Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”*