

“Rooted in Peace”

NT: 1 Peter 3:8-11  
Luke 19:28-42

**Read Luke 19:28-42**

*There once lived a king who announced to prize the artist who would paint the best painting depicting peace. Many great painters sent the king several of their best art pieces. One of the pictures among the various master pieces was of a calm lake perfectly mirroring peacefully towering snow-capped mountains. Overhead was a blue clear sky with fluffy clouds. The picture was perfect. Most of the people who viewed the picture of peace from this various artist thought that it was the best among all.*

*But when the king announced the winner, everyone was shocked. The picture which won the prize had mountains too but it was rugged and bare. The sky looked very angry and there was lightning. The painting did not appear peaceful at all. It looked like the artist had mistakenly submitted his painting depicting storm rather than peace. But if anyone looked closely at the painting, he could see a tiny bush growing in the cracks in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. In the midst of the rush of angry weather, the bird sat on her nest with peace.*

*Peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise or trouble. Peace means to be in the midst of all the chaos and still be calm in the heart. The real peace is the state of mind, not the state of the surroundings. The mother bird at her calm, despite her chaotic surroundings was indeed the best representation for peace.*

We began this series “Rooted” in reference to the vine and our need to abide with Christ. The very next thing we discussed was how we would know if we were rooted? A good barometer to answer how we know if we are rooted is spelled out in Galatians 5:22-23 with the fruits of the spirit. The apostle Paul wrote and said that when we abide with Christ and become rooted in the spirit, our life will be a living revelation of the fruits of the Spirit “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.” All of these fruits are important and I think each one works nicely with any of the others, but today our focus is on peace. The peace we are talking about today is a peace that starts with God, is revealed most graphically on the cross of Christ, is observed as a chief fruit in the transformed children of God and is a major spiritual component of the ever-growing kingdom of God.

I have been challenged this week by this topic. My desk looks like a tornado of thoughts have left their wake as I have trudged through line by line and paragraph by paragraph of a chapter of my final project for my doctorate. Mixed in are bible study and sermon notes. My mind seems to be anything but a peaceful place. The last 2-3 weeks alone have brought news of a weekday school teacher’s death after a short battle this summer, church members who have

passed due to age and others who are doing everything they can to hang on to each living breath they have remaining. My heart seems to be anything but a peaceful place. Turning on the news and seeing the latest numbers of Covid-19 cases rise and taking a family trip up to enjoy the Natural Bridge this weekend seeing people out in nature closing themselves off from one another and others who won't wear a mask and don't seem to have a consideration for others at all. Where is the balance? My emotions seem to be anything but in a peaceful place. I love my kids and my dogs, but they like to push and prod and pull the rubber band of patience as far as it can possibly go sometimes. I love this church, all of you, and my call to serve God's church, but sometimes people come through the doors and don't have kind or loving or beneficial things to share. My home and the church seem to be sometimes anything but a peaceful place. Rather than ask "Where is the Love?" like we did a few weeks ago I am asking "Where is the peace?"

In my search for peace, do you know where I think there is always God's peace? While eating an ice cream sundae or a piece of cheesecake or black-tie tuxedo mousse cake from Olive Garden 😊 Seriously though, the place of peace I am referring does have food, but it is not really about the food itself. The one place I have always known I could go to experience peace in all its glory is the Lord's table. At the table, not only does God take ordinary elements like bread and cup and make them extraordinary through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, but God unites God's children of every time and place together. One God. One Lord. One table. One love. One community. For the sake of that remembrance and celebration, everyone puts aside everything else. That is a perfect picture of peace. At the table, God makes room for everyone to come and participate. Whether you have celebrated the sacrament often or it has been a long time. Whether you have maintained a faithful spirit in your life or you have fallen away from God and want to work back to a right relationship. At the table, Christ invites all of us who are weary and carrying heavy burdens. Why? To give us rest. All of us who are hungry and thirsty. Why? To feed us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation. At the table, we celebrate Christ's fulfillment as the coming Prince of Peace.

(Celebrate Communion at 9 am)

At this point during our outside service earlier today, we turned to the table to celebrate communion together. We won't be stopping now to celebrate communion during this service, but I would like to invite all of you to stop at some point today, or the next few days, gather at a table, break bread and share it, pour juice or wine and share it, and remember the love and sacrifice of our Lord Jesus whom God sent to earth as the Prince of Peace, Lord of Lords, King of Kings. Allow the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to be with you and empower you. Feel the unity of all your brothers and sisters in Christ celebrating with you and pray to God for the nourishment of your soul, peace in your heart and in your mind, and the strength and courage to be transformed in such a way that your life will never be the same. Commitment to

participate in this celebration has the power to refresh, renew, and redeem, for the story behind this sacrament is really about peace.

Isaiah shared prophecies of a coming King, Prince, Lord, and Messiah who would save God's people. Jesus was that coming King, Prince, Lord, and Messiah. As a King, people would bow down. As a Prince, he would usher in a new era. As Lord, people would rely on him. As Messiah, he would be the Christ, the one who sacrificed for all. The story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem embodies Jesus fulfillment as Prince, for his entry symbolizes the ushering in of a new era. Peace may or may not be the word of choice to describe what took place, but like the painting that won the King's approval, it was God's peace amidst the chaos that was being ushered in.

The symbolism of acts helps to reveal Christ's peace. For example, Jesus rode in on a donkey; a servant animal. A King on a donkey would have been a sight to see and indeed it was with Jesus. Had Jesus mounted a war horse instead of a donkey he certainly would have made a statement, but it would have been that of war. The people in the streets recognized Jesus and laid their coats and palm branches down shouting Hosanna, but Jesus also knew the crowd in the distance, made up of religious leaders and those looking for Jesus, were watching. Jesus, being one with God, knew what was going to happen. Jesus knew his time had come and what his purpose was. As Jesus rode to his death, he did so with peace in his heart. He entered in peace, rode in peace, and approached with peace. Jesus didn't fight back against the authorities who would beat him and mock him and hang him and eventually kill him. Jesus embodied true peace amidst treacherous and dangerous and life ending circumstances. This is why Jesus is called the Prince of Peace.

From the beginning of creation, we learn that God is a God of peace and order. He took the formless void and chaos and gave it harmonic purpose and order. As humanity has messed with that order, God has sought to reestablish the peace and order, for God is not a God of confusion but of peace. The move from God's covenant with God's people in the Old Testament to God's new covenant with God's people in the New Testament required a significant act on God's part. Life for the Israelites and the world had become disoriented and confusing. God's way had been moved to the back burner of society and society was struggling. Being second place is not an option for God, so God acted by sending the greatest gift God could give: love in the form of a man, Jesus, who could show them the way. The mission of Christ was to bring peace to the world and God knew the death and resurrection of Jesus was always going to be a part of the plan. God longed to transform our chaotic and hateful world into a world filled with God's peace and love. Jesus as the Prince of Peace spoke to this mission. Jesus would be the One to finally bring peace to the world.

But how could this be? There are still wars. There are still piles of books and screaming children and indifferent attitudes. There is still disease, dis-ease, death, and oppression. Doesn't look like the peace Jesus brought is working. If we are looking for our lives to be like the tranquil painting with no disturbance then yes, it wouldn't appear as though Jesus' peace is working. But that really isn't what peace means. To have God's peace is to have shalom or well-being. In the bible, peace means a close relationship with God yielding prosperity, well-being, health, completeness, and safety, as well as an absence of war. All peace comes from the Lord. He is the foundation of peace and he is the ultimate example of a life of peace. This peace comes to us as a result of restored righteousness; our personal chaos being redeemed. This peace is only fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is "our peace".

Being rooted in peace means first and foremost being rooted in Christ. Without Christ, we have no hope of shalom; no hope of peace; no hope of prosperity; no hope of well-being; no hope of health; no hope of completeness; no hope of safety. Just the opposite is also true. With Christ, we have hope of shalom; hope of peace; hope of prosperity; hope of well-being; hope of health; hope of completeness; hope of safety. We must be rooted in Christ to be rooted in peace. We must be nourished by God's good gifts of love and grace and mercy and we must have faith in the power of Christ's life to overcome death to begin to know what it means to be rooted in peace.

With faith in God and the act of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins, the pathway to peace is formed. As a result of this pathway being formed and opened, we are filled with the opportunity and responsibility to share the peace of Christ that has filled us with others. Like we are able to love because of God's love for us, so too we are able to share peace because of God's peace given to us. At the root of this is forgiveness and reconciliation. Just as we have been forgiven, so too are we to forgive. We are to bear with one another when there is a complaint against another and with every effort we are to work toward harmony and reconciliation. If Christ's peace isn't obvious, it is not because it isn't there; it is because we are not allowing it to take root and ripen in our lives.

Just like I said last week about grace not being an excuse for the wrong but love for the wrongdoer, so it is with peace. Peace is about offering well-being to another. It doesn't mean you like what happened and will forget it. Offering peace means you trust God and ultimately want what is best for someone according to God's will. And because God is a God of peace and not chaos, we trust God will work that relationship for our good as well. Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." The text we read in 1 Peter 3 revealed that if we want a life of joy, and who doesn't, seek peace.

Hebrews 12:14 says, "Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness- without it no one will see the Lord". Our main goal as God's children is to be and share God's love and light as instruments, vessels, and prisms. Peace is a major element needed to reveal God's love and light fully.

*One day the most peaceful inhabitants from the Earth asked one very powerful wizard to stop all wars and bloodshed on the planet. "It is simple," he said, "I will destroy all weapons on the Earth, and nobody will be able to fight anymore." "That would be great!" the people exclaimed. The magic wand waved, and it was done.*

*There was peace on the planet for three days, while the majority of those who were prone to fight, sought and could not find a weapon. When they understood they had lost weapons forever, they began to make spears of young trees and started to fight again. When the wizard heard this bad news, he said: "Do not worry. I will destroy all young trees, so that they will not be able to fight."*

*After two or three days of useless searches for young trees which were suitable for making spears, rebellious people started to cut giant trees to make batons from them and the bloodshed started again. The wizard then destroyed all big trees. When humans made knives and swords of metal, the wizard destroyed all metal on the planet. People made slings and began to throw stones at each other and it was necessary for the wizard to destroy the stones, too.*

*The peacekeepers began to worry: "All trees have disappeared; there is no metal and stones. How do we live? What do we eat now? There will be no vegetation soon, and people will die without even fighting. No, this is a wrong solution of the problem."*

*The wizard became confused: "I do not know how to behave now. I could destroy all humanity, but, unfortunately, that is not in my power!"*

*The peacekeepers fell into despair; they did not know what to do. And then one clever kid turned to the wizard. "I know what you should do. Let people feel how others perceive their actions. If one person hurt someone, let him feel the same pain, and if he brings joy to someone, let him feel the same joy. That way no one will hurt each other, because he will feel the pain immediately too and would want to stop."*

*All people were inspired with the greatness of the kid's thought, and the wizard realized the kid's idea. He returned all trees, stones and metals.*

*Since that day nobody on the planet tried to hurt his neighbor, because he would have to feel the same pain too. People began to help each other, because they liked the sense of joy they felt while doing so. And the people began to live in harmony and joy.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, being rooted in peace and revealing God's peace to others is just that easy and it is just that hard. One act of peace at a time, for God, for the world, for Lynchburg, for the church, for family, for our work environment, for our homes, for yourself. May God's peace be with and guide us all.

Let all God's people say... Amen.