

## “The Gift of Peace”

(A Sermon for the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost)

**Text:** Philippians 4:1-9.

**Lectionary Texts:** Exodus 32:1-14; Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23; Matthew 22:1-4; Philippians 4:1-9

**Subject:** Peace.

**Desired Response:** Channel your mind properly.

**How To:** Memorize and master Philippians 4:8-9.

**How Long:** Less than an hour.

**Sermon in a Sentence:** “Peace belongs to those whose minds have been channeled properly.”

**Worship Theme:** “Among the many blessed gifts God gives His dearly loved children is the gift of peace.”

When I was younger there was a comic-strip character called “Li'l Abner.” Anyone remember him? Well, Li'l Abner used to say:

Peace is better than war, because it's nicer.

And, who wouldn't agree?! Doesn't just about everyone long for world peace? Is it not at the very top of the agenda of many world leaders? Peace—the proverbial dove with the olive sprig in its beak.

Peace ranked high on Christ's list, as well. You recall the angel announcement at His birth found in Luke 2:14:

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace...*

Jesus also said things like the following found in John 14:27:

*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.  
I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace.*

Peace—the word refers to the “absence of conflict.” On the world scene, that's in terms of nations. Within an individual, it's an “undisturbed state of mind.”

Peace—even the word sounds good, doesn't it?

Notice the occurrence of the word “peace” in today's passage of Scripture found in Philippians 4:1-9:

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!*

<sup>2</sup> I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

That last paragraph, consisting of Verses 8 and 9, ends with this phrase:

*... And the God of peace will be with you.*

Do you happen to recall the overall theme of the Book of Philippians? Paul wrote this wonderful letter to the Christians gathered in the house churches at Philippi, urging them to understand that to strive side-by-side for the Gospel means believers must think the way Christ thinks. That message was particularly true for those early Christians. And, it is most certainly true for us today.

“Think like Christ thinks.” The mind is seen as very important all through Philippians:

*“Have this mind among yourselves...”; “...let those who are mature be thus minded”; “...complete my joy by being of the same mind”*

—and so on.

In these verses, we’re zeroing in on the mind—“think about these things,” writes Paul in verse 8, and peace will be yours.

Should you fill your mind with what is false—NO! Instead, think about what’s true. Should you allow yourself to be enticed by the dishonorable—NO! Instead, whatever is honorable, think about that. Not the unjust, but the just; not what’s dirty or impure, but what’s pure and clean.

Avoid the ugly; concentrate on the lovely. Don’t be taken with the rude or crude—fix your mind on the gracious. Leave the second- and third-rate alone—if there is any excellence, think about that. Whatever is unworthy of praise or commendation, keep at arm’s length—be done with it—focus, rather, on what’s worthy of praise.

Good advice, right? Simple, but sound, yet so seldom heeded the way it should be by people who for some reason or another are strangely attracted to the reverse of what Paul has listed here.

How the Apostle’s advice might sound in our contemporary setting could be something like:

When you point your web browser to Facebook, or Twitter, or Instagram, or SnapChat, or any of a number of social media websites, don’t focus on posts or photos that are cruel, or demeaning, or provocative, or salacious, or nasty. Instead, read posts that encourage, or uplift, or make you feel at peace.

It is so easy, especially in this time of supercharged political strife and disagreement, to be drawn into posts that tear down the people who think differently than you do. Yes, there are some issues about which you may have strong feelings. But, should your political or social feelings overwhelm the love that Christ has placed in your heart?

In regard to posts on social media, I have two very dear friends who live in two far away places. I'm going to share some things about them with you to illustrate my point about how we take in information and how we give it out. In the stories I'm about to share with you, I've purposely disguised the facts in order to protect their privacy. But, I can assure you that none of you know them, so I could actually tell their stories without disguising who they are.

In many years past, both of these dear friends have declared their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Both became extremely active in their respective churches. Both raised their children to follow Jesus. And, in many ways, both seemed model citizens of God's Kingdom. But then, something unexpected happened to each of them.

One friend ended up in the hospital with a sudden illness. In fact, this dear one was on a respirator for several days hovering near death. Finally, the doctors found the cause of the sudden illness, administered treatment, and my friend began to recover. However, during his time of need, the church where this friend attended did not respond in the same way that he expected. In fact, the friend felt that his fellow Christians more or less ignored his plight.

As a result, he became quite bitter toward the church, and even more so toward God. He felt that because he had devoted himself to serving God, the very least God could do was to keep him healthy. And, he had, indeed, served God in a rather spectacular and devoted way. But, he clearly misunderstood the way that God works. God never promised that we who follow Him would be protected from the pervasiveness of sin in our human existence. We are every bit as subject to disease and illness as non-believers.

Because God did not meet my friend's pre-disposed expectations, he turned his back on the church, and for the most part on God, as well. Today, this friend almost constantly posts negative comments about God, the church, and Christians in general, on Facebook and Twitter. Where once he was a champion of God's Kingdom, my friend has now become an enemy of Christ and His people.

My second friend is one whom I have known well since the late 1970s. But, in the last ten years, she has taken a turn in her life that I could have never predicted. If I were to offer my analysis of what happened to her, I would have to say that things also occurred in her life that she never expected. And, she became angry with God. You see God didn't "perform" exactly the way my friend thought God should.

First of all, my friend lost her job as a professor at a Christian college. She didn't really do anything wrong. She simply failed to attend one of the area churches approved by the college Board of Directors. The Board of the college decided to make an example of my friend, in spite of the fact that she was one of the most popular, well-liked, and well-respected professors.

Then, my friend's husband was stricken with cancer. This fine man endured the horror of chemotherapy and radiation treatments. And, while my friend's husband survived and recovered, my friend felt that God had, again, let her down by not protecting her husband from disease.

As she was still reeling from these turns of events, her only daughter announced that she was pregnant. The daughter was not married and had been lured into an affair at her place of employment by a much older, married man.

As a result of these events, instead of turning her back on God—as my first friend had done—this dear friend has created a new god. This new god doesn’t really resemble the God of the Bible very much. This new god only has warm, fuzzy, accepting feelings about people. My friend insists that this new way of looking at life is really Jesus’ way—the way of love. My friend has completely re-defined sin, re-defined the way she reads the Bible, and even re-defined the message of the gospel.

Now I do believe that God’s very essence is love. God is clearly also a God of justice, a God of holiness, a God who does not tolerate sin, a God who expects His dearly loved children to respond in obedience to His will and His written Word.

My dear friend has now focused all her anger and hatred against the very Evangelical Christians with whom she once identified quite strongly. Where once my friend had a zeal for the whole counsel of God, she now focuses her anger through Facebook posts on people who believe the Bible means what it says. It is very sad to observe. Very sad, indeed.

The lesson for us, with regard to social media:

When we point our web browsers to Facebook, or Twitter, or Instagram, or SnapChat, or any of a number of social media websites, don’t focus on posts or photos that are cruel, or demeaning, or provocative, or salacious, or nasty. Instead, read posts that encourage, or uplift, or make you feel at peace.

How else might the Apostle’s advice sound in our contemporary setting? It could be something like:

When we check out at the grocery or the drugstore, shun the pulp publications and their emphasis on the bizarre and the ugly and the dishonorable.

When we stay overnight at a hotel or motel, don’t watch the films made available in the room that are dirty or filled with violence. If you’re tempted in the least in these areas, don’t even turn on the previews; you’re just asking for trouble.

The magazines we buy—if all the time we’re reading about people who are really unworthy of praise, we’re making a big mistake.

The music we hear and unconsciously sing or hum—is it abrasive in theme, crude, hostile, unbecoming? If so, we’re foolish to listen to it.

Have we brought into our homes, through subscription TV, elements that more often than not are contemptible and sordid, indecent, corrupt, even pornographic—that’s just plain stupid.

Reading the wrong books can lead us down dangerous paths, can twist our thinking, can make lies appear reasonable and truthful. Can even create an appetite for the satanic.

What is the Apostle Paul saying? He’s warning us to guard our minds!

As a little child has nightmares—the last part of that word, MARE, comes from Old English M-A-E-R-E, or witch: a witch in the night—expose a child to evil when awake, and yes, in their sleep, the night witch will come for sure. But, that’s true for adults as well.

Conversely, it’s also such that if you think about these things:

*...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. [Paul says] And the God of peace will be with you.*

“Peace belongs to those whose minds have been channeled properly.” That’s my key sentence for this sermon. “Peace belongs to those whose minds have been channeled properly.”

Here’s where the battleground is—in your mind. And, to paraphrase “Li’l Abner”:

*... personal peace is a whole lot better than internal conflict or war, because believe me, it’s just a whole lot nicer.*

Peace of mind—the world for the most part has not listened to the Prince of Peace. Neighbor has not done for neighbor what he would like done for himself. Too often, even believers have fancied that the peace of Christ could be mixed with the turmoil and confusion and hostilities of the deceiver. But, that’s not so. One can’t allow his or her mind to be channeled improperly without courting problems.

“What do you want me to be?” asks someone. “An angel? Blind my eyes to everything questionable? Hope to sprout wings and a halo?”

No—what I had in mind was that you become more Christ-like—a friend of sinners, but not contaminated by their sin.

I have a feeling that those who have made it a point to be more and more Christ-like—these people have a taste of what I’m describing. They’re not perfect, but they’re pressing toward the mark. And, though maybe no one’s said anything about it before, they’re experiencing a great inner peace, as well.

“But what if I admit I’ve not been that way?” you ask. “My mind has not been into the Scriptures. I’m not faithful in my prayers. I don’t practice the presence of the Lord. I’ve not been thinking about meeting with Christ each Sunday in church. What about me?”

Well, I have a one-time suggestion for you—and it’s a good one, too. The whole exercise will take you an hour at the very most. Actually, it probably won’t even take you that long.

**Part One**—memorize this verse, Philippians 4:8:

*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious [so it’s TRUE – HONORABLE – JUST – PURE – LOVELY – GRACIOUS]—if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

Did you get that?

*EXCELLENCE and WORTHY OF PRAISE—think about these things.*

So, again, **Part One**—memorize this verse, Philippians 4:8.

**Part Two**—on your own, write out the verse in reverse. For example:

- The opposite of true is false—don't concentrate on that.
- Not just affirm the honorable—avoid the dishonorable.
- Embrace the just—but not the unjust.
- Pure contrasts with dirty—don't think about the dirty.
- lovely with unlovely—don't think about the unlovely.
- Gracious with rude or crude—don't think about the rude or crude.
- Excellence with second- or third-rate—don't think about the second- or third-rate.
- Worthy of praise with that which is unworthy—don't think about the unworthy.

Your choice of what words are opposites might differ slightly from mine. But, figuring out the reverse helps to understand that for which the verse is calling. You see, I want you to master not just the words, but what these words mean.

Finally, don't forget that the added incentive is this—that you're going to end up knowing peace—remember? Philippians 4:8-9:

*<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

Everyone wants peace. And, the world could have it, if it would submit to the ways of Christ. But, don't forget that, individually speaking, you and I can also know peace—peace of heart and peace of mind. It's the promised possession of all whose minds have been trained to think right.

Songwriter, Vivian Kretz, has written a little gospel chorus that I learned as a teenager. The melody is sweet and peaceful. Here are the words:

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace,  
 whose mind is stayed on Thee:  
 When the shadows come and darkness falls,  
 He giveth inward peace;  
 Oh, He is the only perfect resting place.  
 He giveth perfect peace;  
 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace,  
 whose mind is stayed on Thee.

Christian poet, Michelle S. Lowndes, has written these words in a poem entitled, "God's Peace," that are very appropriate. And, I close with them today.

God's tender love and peace  
Is what we all long for  
In a world so hopelessly chaotic,  
So unstable and unsure

It brings stability to our minds  
And calmness to our souls,  
For that is what we desperately need  
As this world can be so cold

We need to have God's peace  
When turmoil's in our lives,  
For God's peace doesn't depend  
On the daily pressures of life

When we have those stressful days,  
God's peace can often soothe  
And bring us such a quiet hope  
That chases away the blues

So when you feel the pressure on,  
Remember, Jesus Christ,  
Receive from Him the peace He gives  
As His daily dose for life!

© by M. S.Lowndes

Peace—sound good? *"Peace belongs to those whose minds have been channeled properly."*

Amen.