

PEACE – SERMON TRANSCRIPT BY JOSH GIESBRECHT

This morning I get to speak on **peace**, the next-in-line of the fruits of the Spirit listed in from Galatians.

When I first saw the schedule, I thought, “Oh good, this should be a good fit.” ... which I’ll explain with a story later. But over the last few weeks it’s like the peace has been drained out of me, so this has been ...interesting to prepare.

I expected that this was one of those things I could talk about the straight-forward way, focus on “”spiritual”” peace and not all of the other messy uses of the word. But apparently God didn’t want to keep things that simple for me.

So let’s start off by looking at all the complications. Here are some uses of the word “peace”.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; I do not give it to you as the world does.”

- John 14:27

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace but a sword.”

- Matthew 10:34

We probably get the impression here that Jesus is using two different meanings of the word “peace” here. Maybe?

Here’s a current-events usage that’s impacted me personally as a teacher:

“Premier Clark and I have been discussing how we can move forward on our goal for 10 years of labour peace for students in our public education system.”

– Education Minister Peter Fassbender

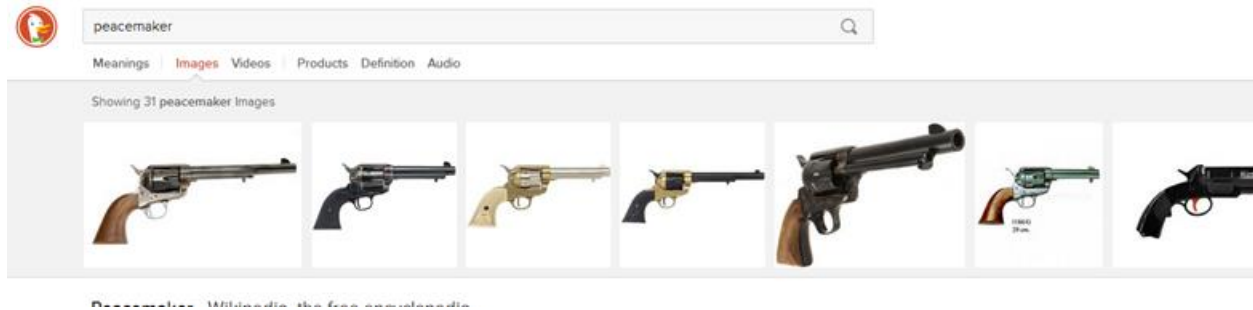
For those who don’t know, the BC government had tried to market this idea to the public over the last year. It sure sounds great, doesn’t it?

But, to keep things simple, let me just say that this wouldn’t have been a “peace” created by coming to agreement on a fair middle-ground. The 10-year deal was heavy-handed, and much of what they proposed amounted to dismantling the other side, silencing their opposition. It was a threat, not a promise. (Since then the two sides have made some progress, and no one’s talking about a ten-year deal anymore.)

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.”

- Matthew 5:9

So we are told to be peacemakers...



...but then we call this “peacemaking”. Peace by force. As long as the good guys win, we’re doing good.

Last Friday was D-Day, celebrating the end of WWII in Europe. I had a student remind me of this; I guess he was studying WWII history recently. Isn’t history weird though? We look through the books and we can see ‘World War I’, “World War II”, “The Civil War”, “The War of 1812”, etc etc. We name each and every war, we memorize it and plant them as guideposts in our timeline. Peace is just an empty space in between wars. Why don’t we name Peaces? Even the dictionary pulls this on us:

Peace: a state in which there is no war or fighting

- Merriam-Webster

It’s like peace doesn’t exist! It’s just a darkness, an absence of the light of war! UGH.

Of course we know that isn’t true. Jesus repeatedly speaks of giving out peace as a blessing. He even gave clear instruction to his disciples to do so:

“Whenever you enter a town or village, find out who is worthy there and stay with them until you leave. As you enter the house, give it greetings. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come on it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.”

- Matthew 10:11-13

So then we have some kind of peace that is tangible, that can be given and kept and returned. This is the kind of peace that first came to my mind when I saw I was lined up to speak on peace.

Peace has a special role in my spiritual life. About 6-7 years ago, I was taking part in Samuel's Mantle. For those who don't know, Sam's is a prophetic training school that's run by very good people here in Abbotsford, meeting in a number of places including our building right here.

Anyway, so here I am in Samuel's Mantle classes, with an interesting mix of people, and we'd do worship and prayer and prophecy over each other, and all kinds of fun things would come up. Many of the students were very physically sensitive to what the Spirit was doing, so you'd have people falling down, or getting wobbly, or other physical manifestations – but it's someone you know, you'd recognize it and know it wasn't a show but an experience of love.

And me? I would ... not experience anything dramatic, really, although that's not entirely true. But for a while I thought it was. Now, I'd come to understand that some people are sort of weathervanes for the room; when the wind of the Spirit blows, they'd just tend to move easier, and that's great because then you know what's happening. So I knew, okay, I'm not a weathervane, that's fine. But what was worse were the times when I was taking part in a prayer tunnel or something like that. I'd sense God doing something strong, and pray it for the person as they came through – and I *knew* who the weathervanes were, they should react

Nope. In fact whatever was going on with them seemed to GO AWAY! Like I'm somehow sucking the life out of the party, or not really contributing anything of what God's doing here.

Then finally someone clued me in to what was really going on.

I forget the exact conversation but it was something like this: "I am SO GRATEFUL for your prayers. When the others pray for me, it's intense and powerful and ... then peace comes from you and it's like relief from all the fire in my body!"

That's when I learned that somehow, I am able to bless people with peace, and it's real. The fire and power is also a blessing and it's good, but peace helps us hold together under the force of it. And in fact praying peace to those wonderful weathervanes actually enabled them to receive even more afterwards without it overwhelming them.

If I needed to name it, I think I'd call it "peace that is given out". I think there's more to say on this but let's settle out what those other peaces are and come back to this one later.

Going back to the second slide, we have a quote from Jesus that's slightly disturbing:

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace but a sword."

Of course, why would we think that he came to bring peace ... I mean it's not like he just finished telling his disciples to bring peace to others except yes he totally did. SAME CHAPTER.

So what kind of peace is this that Jesus is denying?

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

- Matt 10:37-38

Jesus is denying the sort of peace that sacrifices the Best, the Truth, for the sake of keeping someone else satisfied. This is the "peace" of giving in to someone else's lack of boundaries. The other person insists that you not believe the truth, that choosing the truth is turning your back on them. They hold the relationship hostage to force you to back into what fits their lifestyle, their idea of how things should work. This is a relationship-level version of Peace By Force.

Jesus is not in the business of keeping unhealthy patterns and relationships comfortable.

And now I'm reminded of politics again. Of wanting justice. I want to see this as Jesus telling us to side with truth, whether others like it or not. But siding with truth means becoming an advocate, an activist. It means becoming a Ward Draper who's willing to call people on their BS when he sees that it's hurting those with less power to protect themselves. This isn't a soothing-hippy-nature-sounds kind of peace going on here, this is taking a stand against oppression, against pain. And in the process you start seeing just how many people are hurt, how big our racism is, how big our sexism is, how much there is to stand for and how many people would rather hurt you for saying so than deal with their own complicity.

And it's scary.

Peace isn't supposed to be scary.

I started wondering if peace has a parallel to the kind of mistake we've made with Love before. Our protestant churches have spent a lot of time and energy trying to negotiate a theological conflict between God's Love and God's "holiness" or justice. And it's kind of absurd, because when our picture of who God the Father is gets healed, we can go OH COME ON! God's justice isn't about revenge. Justice is supposed to be about making things right. Of course a God who loves us wants to make things right, that's what love is.

"Justice is what love looks like in public."

- Cornel West

So what if we've done the same thing to peace? How do we reconcile God's Peace to God's Justice?

Imagine a God of Peace, looking down to earth from wherever heaven is. This God sees our pain, greed, war, oppression, suffering, and injustice. What kind of character are we imagining that God of Peace to have? If God loves us, shouldn't that peace be shattered by seeing our suffering? Is this a "peace" of indifference, of resignation to how things are? Pretty soon we get a bipolar God; we try to imagine him being a God of Peace, but the Peace we've imagined is in constant tension from witnessing so much evil ... leading us to believe that eventually that tension will break and release the other side of the bipolar God, a God of Wrath again.

That's the wrong kind of peace. It starts to sound a lot like peace by force again. And it's missing something we heard last week, that God has a tremendous capacity to feel. Grief and joy can coexist in the heart of God.

So what kind of peace is this that can exist along with all this injustice?

Where does peace come from when faced with greed, hate, suffering, oppression?

“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in the Son and through him to reconcile all things to himself by making peace through the blood of his cross – through him, whether things on earth or things in heaven.”

- Gal 1:19-20

This is the heart of God. God sees us, in our hate, our collective brokenness, our systematic racism, our sexism, our economics of greed, our Peace-Through-Force that only breeds more hatred and violence. He sees it all, the hurt, the ones who hurt others, and everyone in between. And he says, I am tired of Peace-By-Force. I love you all and I can't stand watching this Thing that you build that does nothing but break your bones and kill you. I am going to send the full force of my love for you and stand there and let it hit me as hard as it can until I am dead, and MY BLOOD IS GOING TO END THIS because there's no revenge left, no revenge big enough for what has been done and the cycle is OVER. And I call you all to join me and take up your crosses, because your guns are never enough. Your guns are never going to bring back the dead, cure the sick, heal the wounded. We are going to do that with love.

That's making peace through the blood of the cross.

When I walk Peter to sleep and he's crying, I mostly say, "It's all right, it's all right." I started doing that when Nathanael was a baby, and I struggled with it. How could I tell him it's all right? I don't know that. Maybe he's really hurting, maybe he's in pain. Maybe we're in a world full of horrible things and I can't protect him from them all.

But somehow I still knew, this was the right thing to say. And it's only the second time through, with Peter, that I think I get it. "It's okay, you're not alone. I'm with you. I'm going to carry you."

I think we're back to the "peace that is given out". Being loved is what gives us peace.

And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

- Philippians 4:7

When we experience love, it shuts down fears. It shuts down the tape that's replaying in our heads over and over where we describe to ourselves everything we're afraid might happen. When we experience love, it tells us "everything is okay", and it's true, and we want to argue it but we can't because everything we think we're afraid of is nothing compared to being loved. Nothing we thought we needed is as important as being loved. We were made for it.

And that's where peace comes in. You can't look at the world around you and make sense of why you feel peace. You feel peace because God is loving you.

And when we're walking in a world of pain, abuse, oppression, lies, war, we know that none of that is good or right and we can feel the pain in God's heart for his children and somehow we can still find peace because that God is with us, right now, loving us.

And, here's the best part:

And **the peace of God** that surpasses all understanding **will guard your hearts and minds** in Christ Jesus.

- Philippians 4:7

That peace of being loved will keep you safe.

It keeps you from depression, from acting out of fear. It protects you so that you don't have to try to use anger to protect yourself.

When we don't have that peace, we malfunction. When we do have that peace, it guards us no matter what the world does to us.

Let's end this off with something to do. Who feels like their peace has been stolen lately?

Okay, now I'd like everyone who can to find someone nearby who needs prayer, and just bless them with peace. If you don't know how, pray something like, "Holy Spirit, come rest on this person, wash away the junk and fill them with peace."

(maybe for me too)