

Accept His Peace

Exodus 17:3-7; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-26
Saint Paul's Memorial United Methodist Church
1001 W Colfax Ave, South Bend, Indiana 46616
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Exodus 17:1-7 (NIV)

¹ The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?" ³ But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

⁴ Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵ The LORD answered Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink."

So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Romans 5:1-11 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

John 4:5-26 (NIV)

⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." ¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹ Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

Accept His Peace

It was the deciding round of play in the 1983 U.S. Open golf tournament. A player named Larry Nelson was tied for first place. But then he hit a difficult situation. His approach shot to the sixteenth

green left him sixty-two feet from the hole. His fans groaned. In the world of golf, sinking a sixty-two-foot putt is about as likely as a hole-in-one.

Larry Nelson paused for a long moment. Then he raised his head, sized up the terrain, and stroked his ball. It rolled downhill for a spell, then up an incline, then down another slope, and up another, and finally it curved, and then Ker plunk! into the hole it went. Some called it the shot of the year.

Bolstered by this magnificent putt, Larry Nelson went on to win the tournament, his first victory following a two-year slump.

One of the reporters who flocked to get his comments after the tournament asked him if he had been praying during the match, especially before that fateful putt. “Yes,” Larry Nelson answered. “Were you praying you’d make the shot?” the reporter asked. “No,” Nelson said.

“Well, then, what were you praying for?” asked the reporter. Larry Nelson’s answer should help all of us. He replied simply, “Peace.”

Is there anyone in this room who is not, one way or another, seeking peace — peace in our hearts, peace in our marriages, peace in our relationships with other family members, peace in our work?

Of course, some of us seek peace from some unusual sources. One woman said her therapist told her the way to achieve true inner peace was to finish what she started. She took the advice to heart. She said, “So far today, I have finished 2 bags of chips and a chocolate cake. I feel better already.”

Well, they don’t call it “comfort food” for nothing. However, there are better ways to find peace.

The good news for this third Sunday in Lent comes from St. Paul. He says in Romans 5: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....” Paul goes on to say to us that even in the midst of suffering and misfortune we can have this peace. Even though we are undeserving of it, we can have this peace because of what Christ has done for us on the cross of Calvary.

Now a word of caution should be spoken at this point.

THE PEACE THAT CHRIST GIVES IS NOT A PASSIVE PEACE.

That is, some people are at peace because they ignore the needs of those around them, as well as the needs of their community and world. Their attitude is, “What, me worry?” That is not the peace that Christ is talking about.

There is a story that comes out of World War II. Japanese war planes were headed toward Pearl Harbor where they would make a devastating attack. Before these planes made it to Pearl Harbor,

though, two American soldiers stationed on the island spotted them on their radar and reported this fact to their commanding officer, a young lieutenant. The young lieutenant gave the report a few minutes thought and concluded that what these soldiers had seen on their radar screens must have been American planes coming from California. “Don’t worry about it,” he said.

Well, they should have worried about it. We don’t know how many lives might have been saved if they had worried about it enough to go into action. “Don’t worry about it,” turned out to be a terrible bit of advice.

There are some things that we should worry about. Jesus saw the money changers in the temple taking advantage of worshippers, and He worried about it to the point of driving them out into the streets.

Jesus worried about people who were lost in their sins, and so He gave His life on behalf of all of us because, at heart, we are all sinners. On another occasion Jesus said, “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

There are some things that Christians ought to worry about. For example, even though we want to be safe from terrorists ourselves, if you are not worried about the plight of immigrants today, some of whom are Christians, who are fleeing persecution and, in some cases starvation, then shame on you!

If the increasing number of violent deaths from acts of violence in our own land does not bother you, then may God have mercy on you.

If the disintegration of family life in our nation doesn’t bother you, then something is missing in your spiritual life.

There are problems over which every Christian ought to have a deep and heavy burden. There is a time for moral indignation and strong remedial action. There is a difference between having God’s peace, and being an insensitive clod caring only about yourself! In the words of the prophet Jeremiah, “They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush.” In a self-centered generation we must continually be on guard that our desire for peace does not cause us to ignore our responsibilities as soldiers of the cross.

STILL THE DESIRE FOR PEACE IS ONE THAT GOD HAS PLANTED IN OUR HEARTS.

Jesus said on one occasion, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (John 14:27).”

Peace is one of Christ’s great gifts to us. In fact, a strong sense of inner peace is what allows us to make a positive difference in the world. Sure, we are called to rid the world of wrong-doing, and there

are tragic things happening in our world that should trouble us deeply and that we should do something about.

The ironic thing, however, is that these are not the things that generally rob us of our peace. The things that rob us of our peace are often superficial things. Things like our appearance, or whether we are keeping up with our neighbors.

In our lesson from Exodus, the children of Israel are wandering in the wilderness on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. They are without water. They are thirsty and complain to Moses, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?”

That’s a legitimate complaint, don’t you think? If you are faced with a problem that severe it’s perfectly all right to complain to the Lord. If you’re dying of thirst. If your children are in danger of starving. If you have a terminal illness, you have a right to ask, “Where are you, God?”

The children of Israel, after an extended stay in the desert, are thirsty and quite naturally they complain to Moses. Moses cries to the Lord, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

Now it’s Moses who is worried. No leader wants his people to turn against him. The Lord tells Moses to go to a place called Horeb and strike a rock and water would come forth from the rock and the people would be able to have all they wanted to drink. Afterwards Moses names the place Massah and Meribah because of the faultfinding of the people, and because they put the Lord to a test by asking, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

Obviously the children of Israel are not the only persons who have asked the question. “Is the Lord among us or not?” Sometimes it seems difficult to trust in God. Sometimes it’s so difficult to heed Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:31, 32, “Don’t be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on your heavenly Father knows you need them all.”

Jesus is answering that question posed to Moses: “Is the Lord with us or not?” And the answer is a resounding, “Yes! God is with us! God will provide for us just as He provided for the children of Israel!”

Moses struck the rock and water came forth, enough to provide for his large company of Hebrews there in the wilderness. I don’t know how striking a rock produces water. I’ve never seen such a rock. I suspect, however, that’s the point. It wasn’t the rock that met Israel’s needs, it was God. God provides for those who love Him.

SOME OF OUR ANXIETY COMES FROM CONCERN ABOUT OUR DAILY NEEDS.

Have you ever done that — wasted time and energy worrying? A Peanuts cartoon once showed Linus dragging his blanket and saying to Charlie Brown, “Charlie Brown, you look kind of depressed.” Charlie Brown replies, “I worry about school a lot.” Then he adds, “I worry about my worrying about school.” Then he concludes, “Even my anxieties have anxieties.”

Many of us can sympathize with Charlie Brown. Even our anxieties have anxieties. We all know that needless worry is destructive. We know that God loves us and will provide for us. But it is so hard to cultivate a peaceful heart and mind.

I’ve read somewhere that when Rossini’s opera, The Barber of Seville, was first performed, it was booed off of the stage. The audience was vigorous in its displeasure. Afterwards the cast was nearly hysterical. There is much pain in being in a theatrical production that has just bombed. The cast was commiserating with one another, when they noticed that Rossini was not among them. Fearing that he might have done something desperate, they rushed to his house. There they found him asleep.

“Maestro, are you all right?” they asked. “I was until I was awakened,” he responded. “But what about the opera?” they asked in obvious despair. Quietly Rossini answered, “So it is not good enough. I will have to compose something better — that is all. But please, let us discuss that in the morning. I would like to go to sleep now.”

Many of us need to pray for such an attitude as that. Many of us are not as effective in our service to God because we are not trusting that God will meet our needs.

OTHERS OF US HAVE TROUBLED MINDS BECAUSE OF GUILT OVER SOME PAST DEED, OR EVEN AN INVOLVEMENT IN AN UNHEALTHY SITUATION RIGHT NOW.

In our lesson from John’s Gospel a Samaritan woman comes to the well at Sychar to draw water. She had come in the heat of the day. Why then? She will be carrying a heavy jug of water back to her home. Heat makes carrying a heavy vessel that much more tiresome. Why come in the heat of the day?

Probably it was because she was seeking to avoid the other women in her village, worried about what they thought of her. After all, her life was a mess. She had been married five times, and now she was living with a man without benefit of wedlock, a common practice today, perhaps — but not 2,000 years ago.

Today we would say that this woman had a serious problem with her relationships, particularly with men. Maybe she had a poor relationship with her father. We don’t know her situation, of course, but we do know that in order to give love, you must have experienced love. Chances are this woman had such a low opinion of herself that she could not relate to a man as an equal, but only as an object which he might use and cast away at his pleasure. Now she was looked down on by her community because, in their eyes, she was living in sin.

What a startling thing it was that this pious Jewish Rabbi would show some interest in one such as she. She could not know that there would come a time when He would show such interest that He would die on a cruel cross in order to bring her, and others like her — us for example — into a right relationship with God. “Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man,” St. Paul writes incredulously in our lesson for today, “though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”

My friend, have you let your life get out of control because you’ve never truly accepted God’s forgiveness and grace? Do you somehow feel that you don’t measure up, that you are unacceptable, unworthy, unloved? There is a man who died on a cross who says something quite remarkable. He says that you are worth dying for. All you have to do is accept His amazing grace.

St. Paul writes, “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” What wondrous good news that is. If we do not have that peace, we lose energy worrying about the wrong things. If we do not have that peace, we may carry a life-long burden of feelings of unworthiness. No wonder that before he sank that sixty-two foot putt, Larry Nelson prayed for peace. Peace really is one of the most precious gifts that Christ offers us.

One elderly gentleman found that peace even though he was confined to a bed for forty years because of a fall that left him with a broken neck. His back was broken, but not his cheerful spirit. A friend once asked him if he were not tempted at times to be bitter toward God.

The old man answered, “Oh, there are times when I have been tempted. It is difficult to look out my window and see my friends doing things that I will never be able to do. At such times questions have come to me about the goodness of God.”

His friend asked earnestly, “What do you do at such times?” The old man answered, “In my mind I go to Calvary and think about Christ and the wounds that He bore in His body on my behalf. As I think about the cross and the great love God must have for me, doubt and bitterness melt away. I know Jesus loves me. The cross says it all.”

The cross does say it all! Do you have a troubled spirit? Do you waste valuable hours worrying about things beyond your control?

Are there things in your past, or even in your present, that rob you of your peace because you know that they are outside the will of God for you?

I invite you to go to the foot of the cross and see there just how much God loves you. Invite Jesus Christ into your heart. Make Him the Lord of your life. Accept that love for yourself. St. Paul writes, “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Accept God’s peace today.