

What Is This Peace God Gives?
Numbers 6:22-26
John 20:19-23
12th in the Series of great Themes of the Bible
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President Jack Kennedy in his State of the Union speech in 1963 said,
"The mere absence of war is not peace."

When we think of the word peace, we think like Kennedy's listeners, that peace is an absence of hostilities. Such a notion of Peace is not what God means when God speaks of God's peace or when Jesus tells his disciples, "I give you my peace." For God, peace is something more than no war.

Today, we move to the 12th in the Series on the great themes of the Bible, themes that unite the Bible and offer God's word as a whole, rather than just a part. God's idea of peace is first seen in the Garden of Eden and it occurs again and again across the Bible as the measuring standard for the depth of our relationship with God.

To make this theological concept more concrete, I want you to imagine two circles, far apart. Draw them on your Bulletin, one at the left top of the page and one at the right. I don't want you to do anything else with those circles except look at them from time to time as we consider God's word for us today, and at the end, we will look at the circles again and consider what they teach. You can begin thinking about the circles as we talk, and when you think you have it, and understand what the circles teach about peace, God's peace, then just quietly hold up a hand. I'll nod when I see it. You don't have to get it early. It's OK, but after we consider the meaning, I hope all of our hands go up in praise of our Lord.

Our first reading today is from Numbers 6:22-27, not Psalm 34, as I had originally put in the Bulletin. I am switching because a Sunday School class is going to study Numbers this year, and I thought we might take a peek at a beautiful passage there, maybe an enticement for further study.

Numbers 6

- 22 Then the Lord said to Moses,
23 "Tell Aaron and his sons to bless the people of Israel with this special blessing.
24 The Lord will bless you and keep (protect) you,
25 The Lord will smile upon you and be gracious to you.
26 The Lord will show you his favor and give you his peace."
27 Whenever Aaron and his sons bless the people of Israel in my name, I myself will bless them."

In this blessing God says I will give them my peace. Obviously, God doesn't mean an end to war—because Israel always seemed to be at war; and peace doesn't mean the absence of strife among family members—that's never ended, and peace doesn't mean we'll always be able to get along with our neighbors—some neighbors are just downright mean. Strife and family wars have existed since Cain and Abel, and it's not letting up in this age. Today, no one respects or honors anyone else. And there is no peace. But it's not that kind of peace that God is talking about when God says, I will give you my peace?

A hint! In the ancient city of Corinth, there were too many people there to all live with the walls of the city; some lived outside the walls on an outcropping of land, a high saddle of land to the east, near the coast. When trouble came, the people of Corinth went up the hill to a high-walled citadel, where it was safe. Think about your circles!

In the Hebrew language the main word for peace is "Shaloam." The word appears over 200 times in the Old Testament, but in only 60 of those times is it used to mean the absence of strife. In the New Testament the Greek word for peace is Eirene, again, not necessarily meaning the absence of strife. So, what does God want us to hear when God gives us this peace?

Before I answer that let's look at John 20:19-23, where Jesus talks about peace. This is a post resurrection appearance of the risen Christ, the one in which Christ suddenly appears among his disciples in a closed room. LET'S LISTEN AGAIN FOR God's word:

John 20

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together. With the doors locked, for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again, Jesus said, "Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, I am sending you."

22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

THE WORD OF THE LORD!

Peace be with you. ... Jesus' first words to them after his resurrection! Words that echoed those he gave them at the last supper, a few days before—words from John 14:27, where Jesus tells them;

Peace, I leave with you;

my peace I give you.

I do not give to you as the world gives.

So, let not your hearts be troubled, neither let then be afraid."

Peace,
not peace as the world gives it,
but something else,
something different,
something deeper,
something they could touch and feel,
something that would become a part
of them.

Jesus called it "My Peace."

So, what is this peace God gives, that Jesus affirmed?

It is more than interpersonal harmony or international harmony.

Peace is personal harmony,

Peace is having the Holy Spirit within you, walking each step of the way with you,
showing you the way, helping you walk into and through difficult times, without wavering in
your faith.

Peace is experiencing God's presence in everything you do.

Peace is living in a right relationship with God.

Peace is being conscious of God's promises as the base for any of your actions.

In short, peace is becoming one and staying one and being one with God. This is why
Jesus is named the "Prince of Peace." He brought God's peace to us and gave it to us by
showing us how to respond to God and how to let God live within us.

Peace is wholeness.

Peace is harmony.

Peace is knowing that nothing can separate us from God or the love of
God.

Peace means we are joined with our neighbors, that we live in unity, that
our wills are second to God's will.

Peace means any hostility we have toward one another has been
replaced by unity, that disorder is gone in favor of order,
Peace means that dissonance has ended and has been replaced by
harmony.

Peace, God's peace, is a gift. Jesus brought it and gave it to us. It becomes more
and more ours, the more Christ fills our hearts and our lives.

Peace means becoming one with God, completely, totally, eternally.

Let's go back to my circles. In the beginning at Eden mankind and God were together, they walked together, they lived together, they shared everything together. Our circle, the bubbles they lived within, were totally within God's circle. Nothing outside the lines. They were together as one. But then mankind separated from God and disobeyed God, We chased our own selfish ways, causing the circles to separate. Ever since, God has wanted the circles back together and has striven mightily to get us together. God did it through a chosen people given the job of finding us and bringing us to God and God to us. God made sure we didn't miss it by sending a Messiah to show us how to live within God's circle, a Messiah who gave his life that the gulf between us and God might be removed, that our circles might overlap and then grow together until each was within the other's circle..

Peace is being one with God, living with an inner and an outer harmony, with God as the main part of all that we do and are.

Because of Jesus, this inner harmony, this uniting with God, is possible. It starts with saying yes to God's "Good New," when it comes near. Because of Jesus, our circles, our bubbles of life, can re-unite and can stay together. It all begins with one little word--- the word "Yes." Yes to the Good News of Christ, yes to the call of God, yes to the will of God, yes to letting God fill your life. Today, you are hearing the Good News pass your way again. If you haven't said yes before, say it now; if your life circle is adrift and way away from God, say yes today, that the circles might come together fully. It's not too late, but soon, soon, it may be. Amen!

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