

Sunday, October 31, 2021

## The Prescription for Peace

(Message 9; Series: *Extreme Discipleship: Living into our Mission*)  
(Colossians 3:15-17)

### Scripture:

*<sup>15</sup>Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:15-17).*

### Message:

The movie, *The Bear*, is the saga of a tiny bear cub whose mother dies. The cub survives but the viewer knows his long-term chances are nil. Then, the unexpected happens. The little cub is “adopted” by an enormous Kodiak. This giant is always watching over the little cub.

He protects the cub from the mountain lion stalking him. He teaches the cub how to be a bear. Everything the “father” bear does, the cub imitates: he stabs at fish, stands on two legs, and scratches his back on a tree - like the daddy bear. As you watch, you become hopeful – the cub has a future, he may make it.

One day they get separated. The little cub can’t see his father anywhere. And then the lion is back. He comes swiftly, silently, face to face with the cub. He is about to spring so the little bear does what he has seen his father do: he rears up on his hind legs, lifts his paws, and tries to growl fiercely. But all he can manage is a little squeak. The mountain lion is not impressed. The cub, his attacker and the viewer know he is about to die.

The camera, focusing on the mountain lion, suddenly catches a look of fear. He stops snarling, turns, and slinks away. The camera returns to the cub. He is as surprised as anyone. Could his unimpressive growl have actually worked? The camera continues to pan back slowly, and we see what we did not know, what the little bear didn’t see, and what explains everything. Behind the little cub is the great Kodiak, standing on his hind legs, his massive body poised to save his son with a single swipe. Pig paws. Fierce growl.

The little cub never had anything to worry about. The forest was safe for the little cub. The father was there all the time even though he didn't *see him*.

## THE PROBLEM WITH PEACE

In our text, God calls us to let the *Peace of Christ* rule in our hearts. We don't live in a world that promotes Christ's peace reigning in our hearts. We don't live in a world that produces peace-filled, peace-focused people. We don't live in a world that trusts God to be there even when we can't see him.

Richard Swinson, author of *Margins*, notes the kind of society we live in:

- Thirty million men in the United States describe themselves as stressed out.
- The average desk worker in America has 36 hours of work on their desk, and they spend three hours a week just sorting out the piles.
- On average, we spend eight months of our lives opening junk mail.
- We spend two years calling people who are not in, or whose line is busy.
- We spend one year searching for misplaced objects, and the average misplaced object has been moved only ten inches from its original place.
- 18.1 percent of the adults in the United States, over 40 million, suffer from an anxiety disorder.
- Consumer debt now stands at \$14.88 trillion (twenty years ago it is just over 1 trillion). The average household has over \$10,000 in credit card debt. Talk about pressure.
- In 1850, the average person slept nine and a half hours per night. Now, thanks to electricity, the average is less than seven hours per night. Over 70 million people have sleep disorders. Newsweek quoted a mother of four: "I am so tired; my idea of a vacation is a trip to the dentist. I just can't wait to sit in that chair and relax." (We're in trouble).

Life isn't much different in the Church. While our Christmas Cards celebrate the coming of the *Prince of Peace* ("Peace" is the most common word in Christmas cards), Christmas is the most frenzied, rushed, hurried, exhausting season of the year – even for Christians (Today is Halloween; tomorrow is the official start of the marathon of decorating, shopping, traveling, wrapping, eating, returning, mailing. Only fifty-five days until Christmas, better get the tree up!). So much for peace.

**Paul exhorts us to allow the peace of Christ to rule our hearts.** The word Paul uses in Colossians **3:15** was used in athletic events to define an umpire or referee, the one who made the final call in an athletic contest. Once the

umpire decided, that was it. (Paul was unfamiliar with American Little League).

Paul says the “*Peace of Christ*” must have the **final word** - not only in our **personal** life, but in our **community** life. This is underscored in the previous verse: “*binding us all together in perfect unity*” (3:14). The peace in our heart must make a difference in our hearts. Paul’s concern is the constant challenge for believers to live together in peace, unity, and love so the world notices!

Conflict will always arise when two or more people are together. There are numerous reasons for that: some neutral (like basic understanding) some negative (like selfishness or a hidden agenda), and some that might even be positive (like wanting the best in a situation but having different paths to achieve it). **Conflict** is not itself the **problem**, but the way it is **handled** can be. Having the “Peace of Christ” in our hearts must **impact**, make a difference. in how we do “Church” **together**.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF PEACE

**What is the peace of Christ and how do we pursue it?** Dallas Willard defines it: “*The peace of Christ is the settled assurance that because of God’s care and competence, the universe is a perfectly safe place for us to be.*” (Even if it doesn’t look like it).

In **Romans 8**, Paul asks “*What can separate us from the love of God?*” He lists all kinds of terrible things that shatter peace: danger, famine, sword, persecution, death itself and concludes *I’m convinced nothing can separate us* [this is a safe place]. When you live with that **assurance**, it changes your **life**, and it must change the life of the community [it too must be a safe place].

A mom is awakened by a very bad thunderstorm. She is concerned for her small son, so she heads down the hallway toward his room assuming he is terrified. He’s coming out of his room with a big grin on his face, “*Mom, you’ll never guess. I was looking out the window at the storm and God took my picture.*” He was convinced God was present, so his room [his world] was a safe place to be. Does our knowledge of God’s presence make this a safe place?

In **Matthew 8**, Jesus’ disciples are frantically trying to keep their boat afloat in a big storm. Jesus is sleeping. Why does Matthew include that little bit of information? Matthew wants us to understand that Jesus knew about the character and competence of his Father. Jesus knows he’s perfectly safe and he wants his disciples to know they’re safe—so in the midst of a storm, Jesus sleeps peacefully.

The disciples went to Jesus (that’s good); they had faith *in* Jesus (that’s good). But they lacked the faith *of* Jesus. They didn’t see the big picture. They

didn't see God's presence. Without the conscious knowledge of God's presence, they didn't live as if they were safe in the arms of God.

What would it look like for us to have the kind of peace that Jesus had?

- Our anxiety levels would go way down.
- Our inadequacies wouldn't haunt us as much.
- We'd be less hurried; we'd have a deeper sense of calm.
- We'd say fewer foolish things; we'd think more before we spoke; we'd be more forgiving, more gracious, more patient.
- We'd have confidence God will take care of us together; we'd experience the "*Peace of Christ*."

When the "*Peace of Christ*" doesn't rule, worry makes us focus on **me** (ourselves, instead of on the community) and we are robbed of the **joy** of being part of God's family.

There's a real strong **relational component** to peace. Paul says, "*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*" (**Romans 12:18**).

The *Peace of Christ* is not the avoidance of confrontation; it is not placating people. It does mean becoming less judgmental, avoiding always comparing, not making everything a (win-lose) competition, and being quick to forgive.

A community where the peace of Christ is reigning would transform the world. That is supposed to be the Church; but it will only happen if believers let Christ rule in their heart.

**One popular solution the world promotes for living in peace is escapism.** Many people searching for a more peaceful (easy) life are moving back to small towns, living off the grid and downsizing into tiny houses. That's not necessarily a bad thing; but they are also increasingly fleeing the poor and needy; they are stepping away from the hard work of community, and they are hoping to distance themselves from the heartache, pain, and suffering of the world for a [supposedly] safer, quieter, easier, more comfortable place to live. Fleeing is not the answer. And... it's not the way of Jesus. Jesus went looking for troubled hearts.

Having the "*Peace of Christ*" reign in us is not a search for the comfortable, the uncomplicated, or the easy.

- Raising our children, we pray they'll walk with God, but sometimes it doesn't seem like they are, and our heart is troubled.
- We volunteer at a homeless shelter, food pantry, or the furniture ministry, and our heart is troubled with the needs we see.

- When someone we love steps off course or finds themselves struggling because of a foolish decision they made, our hearts are troubled.
- We work to build relationships with lost people only to see them turn their back on Jesus, and it troubles us...

We're not called to peace and contentment. We're called to the "**Peace of Christ.**" We're not called to the peace of this world; we're called to the "*Peace of Christ's*" kingdom. We're not called to a peace that is pain free; we're called to a peace that is rooted in the pain and suffering on a **cross.**

## THE PRESCRIPTION FOR PEACE

**There are (at least) three things we should focus on in our pursuit of peace. The first thing we need to do is transform our **thinking together.****

Paul notes there is a way of thinking that leads to the peace of Christ reigning. He writes, "*Let the **word of Christ** dwell in you richly*" (3:16; the "you" is plural.). Invite the Word of Christ to dwell in you (that is, think thoughts of Christ) until it **nurtures** your **soul**:

*"My advice to you is don't worry. Consider the flowers of the field, the birds of the air. They live in the hand of God, and you are infinitely more valuable to God than them. My advice to you is don't worry"* (cf. **Matthew 6:25f**).

*"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me...Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."* (**John 14:1,27**)

*"And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus"* (**Philippians 4:19**).

These are like **post-it-notes** of God's love that the Father leaves throughout his Word in hopes that we'll read them, take them seriously, and live them. They bring peace.

*Isaac Canellis writes about one Thanksgiving when he was growing up. His parents pastored a little Hispanic church—a gutted two-bedroom house—and were very poor. They struggled to pay the rent--\$26 a month.*

*Isaac watched the offering carefully—taken in a little tambourine—hoping for enough money to have turkey on Thanksgiving. The tambourine rattled dully as a few meager coins dropped in. He wondered, "Why isn't God helping?"*

*On Wednesday night the regulars assembled – a little more than a dozen. I tugged on Mama's sleeve: "I know there won't be enough for Thanksgiving dinner. What are we going to do?" "Don't worry, Mejo (son), the Lord will provide."*

*When the service started, Papa spoke about the holiday as a time to give thanks and then asked me to pick up the tithes and offerings. It was an honor to be asked, but the last thing I wanted to do that night. While passing the tambourine, I saw the longest, new black car pull up from in front of the church. A tall handsome man in a tuxedo stepped out, walked in and sat in the second row. The whole congregation wondered who he was.*

*I worked my way around the room toward the elegant stranger until finally I stood in front of him. He reached into his jacket pocket, pulled out a cloth napkin, and slipped into the tambourine. It was so heavy I had to steady it with both hands. 'Thank you,' I croaked as I watched twenty silver dollars roll out of the napkin. Walking back to the front of the church I couldn't contain my happiness. Mama looked at me; I pointed to the tambourine and mouthed, 'turkey.' She just smiled. The stranger slipped out before any of us could find out who sent him. I didn't have to ask. I knew.*

*"Mama is in heaven now. I'm the pastor of Papa's church. We've grown to over 1,000 members with a new church building three blocks from the two-bedroom house where I grew up. I still worry about how our needs will be met, especially since my wife and I have three teenage sons. Then I hear Mama whisper in my ear: 'Don't worry, Mejo, the Lord will provide.' And he has – all the time."*

When was last time God moved in your life? When was the last time God provided for your needs? Maybe it was in the form of material resources; maybe when you were lonely, a friend stopped by; maybe when you faced a dilemma, there was a word of wisdom from an elder; maybe when you were discouraged, God sent a moment in worship, perhaps in a song, that brought hope; maybe when you were tempted, you received the Spirit's power and the community's encouragement to resist.

The prophet invites us to think on these things: *"God will keep in perfect peace the person whose mind is fixed [stayed] on him"* **(Isaiah 26:3)**.

**The second thing we need to focus on** (and this may seem surprising) **is singing together.**

Paul writes– *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teaching and admonishing each other in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs"* **(3:16)**.

Sometimes a **song** can bring peace in a way that nothing else can. And most of the time, singing is something we do together.

Maybe it is at a funeral, where we sing an old familiar hymn: *"When peace like a river attends my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot you have taught me to say, 'It is well, it is well with my soul.'"* (In the face of the

ultimate enemy—death—to sing this song defiantly, trustingly—can be very powerful as we are reminded death does not have the final word!)

Or maybe at the community's celebration of baptism or Lord's Supper, or a poignant moment in worship when our spirit soars and the words take on new meaning. A song has a way of breaking through our defenses and touching our heart and soul.

Christ's people have always been a **singing people**. I remember attending a Youth Unlimited convention years ago at Niagara Falls. One day, over 2000 young people invaded Niagara Falls. While waiting in line for the observation tower, hundreds of teenagers started singing spontaneously—management felt the need to step in and quiet them, but it continued spontaneously throughout the afternoon in the public areas.

Singing has a deep New Testament tradition; people kept breaking into song:

- **Mary**, when she hears she'll be Messiah's mother, sings the "Magnificat" (**Luke 1:46-55**)
- **Zechariah** sings about the coming of John the Baptist (**Luke 1:68-79**)
- The **angels** sing "*glory to God and on earth, peace.*" (**Luke 2:14**)
- After the Last Supper, Jesus and his **disciples** "*Together, they sang a hymn.*" (**Matthew 26:30**) before he went out to die.
- **Paul** and **Silas**—unjustly tried, convicted, attacked by crowd, stripped of clothing, beaten, thrown in jail, fastened in stocks—sang songs... (**Acts 16:25**). Luke adds, "*And the prisoners were listening to them.*" (That's a great line—like they had a choice 😊).
- Singing was an integral part of the new community: "*Sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God*" (**Colossians 3:15**).
- And when Christ returns, **we'll** continue singing – a new song – "*the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb: 'Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations'*" (**Revelation 15:3**).

It is impossible to read the Psalms – even casually – without being struck by how singing was both an **expression** of one's faith and a vehicle through which one's faith was **strengthened**. To sing is virtually synonymous with trusting:

*"But I trust in your unfailing love...I will sing to the Lord"* (**Psalms 13:5-6**)

*"You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent."* (**Psalms 30:11-12**).

Singing strengthens the soul. Singing brings us together. I'm thankful for the singers and instrumentalists here up front who regularly lead us into song—for the way they teach our hearts to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

We are to be a singing people: singing from our hearts; singing from our souls; singing together for all we're worth. Some people have great voices. Some (like me) can't carry a tune in a bucket. It doesn't matter. When we sing together, we are one. It brings joy to God's heart when his children sing of Him, and it brings peace to ours.

You can do it alone. Download a song or two. Play it on your phone, in your car, or your kitchen. Make it a prayer of your heart between you and God.

But make sure we do it together. Engage passionately in *giving thanks to God the Father* through singing. It will bring a sense of peace; it will form us; it will prepare our hearts for the reign of the "*Peace of Christ*."

**The third factor we need to focus on is *praying together*. Or as Peter would say, "Practice constant casting!"** The fisherman once wrote: "*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you*" (**1 Peter 5:7**). (The key word in this verse is "all" because we all have lots of anxieties and worries over our lifetime).

Psychologists speak of how important it is for an infant to learn to be alone in the presence of the parent – especially the mother. When a child is convinced that the mother is available, attentive, and trustworthy, and that he or she won't be abandoned, then they are no longer anxious or clingy. The child doesn't need to be constantly touching or even seeing the mother. The child has learned to trust so the parent is "present" even when the child is alone. Aloneness is no longer terrifying. The child is able to explore the world with confidence.

Similarly in prayer, we need to be *alone* in the presence of God *together*. We need to learn to speak freely and openly with him about our worries and concerns. We need to **trust God** – that he has not, and will not, abandon us, even if we can't touch or see him. He is with us even when – especially when – we are alone and feel alone. Aloneness should not be terrifying because Christ is, Emmanuel, God with us.

We need to learn to **cast off** our anxieties. Our world and most of the people in it tend to destroy our spiritual peace by generating constant anxieties. The world has paid an incredible price for that – people are weighed down by anxiety, crushed by worries, feeling abandoned and alone; their energy has just been smothered out of them. Some years ago, I attended a church growth conference in Las Vegas. In the morning, in order to get breakfast, you must walk by rows of slot machines. There are people sitting in front of them at



seven in the morning – most have been there all night - one of the saddest – yet accurate – pictures of humanity I’ve ever seen.

**Separate** and **destroy** is a major and very effective strategy of the evil one. In his parable of the Sower, Jesus says the seed of Gospel is sown, but it’s often choked and destroyed by thorns. Those thorns, he says, are the cares or anxieties of this world.

Our society is more chained to this world than any generation in history. We’re connected 24 hours a day – cable, satellite, FedEx, cell phones, faxes, e-mail, twitter, podcasts. The technology is amazing; but many have become addicted to it and enslaved by it. We need to get a phoneless cord because what we desperately need is a constant, unbroken connection to God. We’ve plugged into the wrong place.

Paul encourages us not to “*be **anxious** about **anything***” (**Philippians 4:6**), but it is hard to just turn it off. We know we shouldn’t worry, so we worry about how much we worry. We’ve noted we can’t just stop worrying by ramping up more inner fortitude and trying harder. We need to focus on more than ridding ourselves of red monkeys. We need to replace our worries with something else. We need to read the whole verse: “*Don't be anxious, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God.*”

There’s a real close connection (ask Peter and Paul – and Mary too ☺), between **anxiety** and **prayer**. Here is the challenge: allow your anxieties to become your call to prayer. Use them as a prompting from the Spirit to pray. Allow our anxieties, our conflicts, our disagreements, to become an invitation to prayer – extensive prayer.

Remember Pavlov’s dogs? Every time the bell rang, they started to salivate because they knew that dinner was coming. Don't worry about how much anxiety you feel or the tension in the room; let us learn to direct it towards God. Make it a conditioned response. Our anxious feelings and conflicts may subside, or they may not. We can’t beat ourselves up about it or make them go away, but we can, we must, practice “**constant** casting.”

Think right now about the greatest challenge you face. Maybe it is personal: work (maybe the boss), a financial crisis (income is down and the costs are up), a decision you need wisdom on, a sin that is crushing you with guilt. Maybe it is corporate: a family member or friend who needs special care, a marriage or family issue you can’t solve, tension or unresolved conflict in the body of Christ.

God is waiting for us to hand it over to him. He has already promised to take it. We just do it. We need to keep Jesus close, so the peace of Christ can reign in our hearts and lives together - so the world will know “our God reigns.”

Our little growls and snarls are not very much on their own, but behind us stands the One – big paws, fierce growl - who's watching is unceasing. We may not be able to see or even hear him, but he is there all the time, he **loves** us and he **longs** for us to **love** one another in **unity**.

**Let's stand for closing prayer.**

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