

Romans 5:1-11 - Peace

ROMANS SERMON #13 - Advent Week 2 - Peace

December 10, 2017

When God comes near to people in the Bible, they respond, almost every time, with fear. When God came down on the mountain to appear to Moses and give his law, this is what happened:

Exodus 20:18-19 "Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off 19 and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."

There was an accurate sense that to get near to God would mean death.

And that continued throughout the scriptures: when God had his people build a temple, the inner-most part of the temple where the glory of God would dwell was curtained off - you didn't look at it, you didn't get near. Because He is holy, we are sinful, and you're just not buddy buddy with that God. To draw near would mean annihilation.

Ever since the fall, mankind has been at war against God.

The relationship is not naturally warm, but hostile - we are hostile to Him in our sin. He is very composed, but is resolute in His holy wrath against our sin. Our natural state since the fall is not a state of peace with God, but of hostility. We're against Him in our sin, He, in righteous response, is against us in His wrath.

C.S. Lewis wrote, ***"Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms"***¹

So the story of our history with God is that we throw our rocks and stones at God, and God pulls back his bow in response.

And then, God lets the arrows of his wrath fly, and the camera pans to follow them, and we are shocked and surprised to see that they fly into the heart of Christ on the cross. The pent up wrath of God was released, but the arrows didn't hit their deserving targets, they hit God on the cross.

And now there's no more arrow to shoot for those who trust Jesus. He blocked those arrows for us. He is now not hostile to anyone who accepts Christ as that shield.

So now for Christians, hostilities have ceased.

That makes all the difference in the world. The hostility was put to death. That veil in the temple tore from the top to the bottom. And when Jesus appeared to his followers after His resurrection in John 20, He just kept saying, "Peace be with you."

And as we reflect this morning on what that changed relationship means, I'd like to take a moment to quiet our hearts before Him and pray as we open His word.

Romans 5:1-11 "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. 6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare

¹ CS Lewis, Mere Christianity. (New York: HarperCollins, 1952/2001), 56.

even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Peace

When Paul talks about us having peace with God in verse 1, he isn't talking here about a zen-like state, or an inner-calm or *a* therapeutic peace.

There is a kind of inner peace that is available to Christians:

Philippians 4:4-7 "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

There is a peace of God that can be ours by prayer. A calming and confidence that He's got this. Christians can seek that and find that - it's a real thing for us to pursue. "Casting all your cares on God because He cares for you..." So when you're troubled and anxious and afraid and needy, there's a real peace to be had by bringing those things to God. He cares, and He'll take those things, and answer those cries.

But here, Paul is talking not about that internal peace *of* God, but about peace *with* God. The hostilities are over. We have laid down our weapons, He has satisfied his wrath, and now we have real peace. There's a treaty that has been signed.

This isn't the kind of peace we always feel, it can be true for us whether we feel it or not, it's the kind that's a legal reality. The US is at peace with Canada for now, but we don't always feel that. It can affect our feelings. If

we heard Canada was attacking we'd feel that internally. But it's an outer peace, not an inner peace.

It's the legal reality that we are not at war with them.

We have been justified (verse 1), which means we have been declared just, and now we are on His side, no longer at war.

This is what the angel announced with "peace on earth, good will toward men." It wasn't the promise of all the warmth of Christmas, it wasn't the promise of better relationships and less drama and peaceful circumstances. It wasn't a Hallmark peace that he came to guarantee.

In fact, Jesus even said **"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)**

Becoming a Christian can actually create some drama and expose us to some drama that we might have avoided otherwise. Because it calls us to love those who are hard to love, to say hard things, to be part of a church family with people who are very unlike me and think very differently than I do, to forgive those that are hard to forgive. To be a Christian is to be called toward less peaceful circumstances. Don't think Christianity brings "ease" to your life, that's not the kind of peace it brings.

But the long war against God has ended for Christians.

We are no longer enemies, and we can coexist peacefully with a God whose mere presence could have melted us in the past.

But it's better than just a peaceful coexistence and cordiality.

This time of the year a lot of us have some awkward family get togethers. And maybe you're driving there, and your spouse is saying, "Just don't say anything (about whatever the big issue is), just keep your mouth shut, don't rock the boat, let's just have a peaceful Christmas." And maybe you can make it through those gatherings without disruption, but it feels very fragile, like at any moment with one wrong word some hostilities could erupt. It's a fake peace.

But what Christ has purchased for us is not a fragile fake peace. It isn't cordiality. It isn't that He got the Father to just keep his mouth shut about our sin and tolerate us in his presence.

It's far better news than that.

Access

Verse 2 ***“Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”***

We now have access.

“Access” can be translated “an introduction.”² Not only has the King given us a peace treaty, but we've been introduced to Him. We've been brought near. Jesus knew the Father, Jesus knew us, and Jesus brings us near to the Father. And now we aren't outsiders that He has reached a tentative peace with, but we are right there with Him in His throne room. We are near.

God hasn't changed - He's the same God whose presence inspired fear on Sinai and had to be kept from our sight in the temple. But because of what Jesus accomplished, we are brought near without being incinerated. And it's not a fragile peace that could blow up anytime, because He has defused the bomb.

And because God's wrath has been appeased, we no longer need to appease Him. It's not a fake peace, but a real one. We are near.

This will certainly change how and if we pray.

If we think we are still enemies and need to appease God, if we think we are still far off, then we will look for ways to earn a hearing for our prayers.

We will wait a long time after sinning to pray, thinking that enough time in our rooms will earn the peace again.

² Timothy Keller, *Romans for You* (Round Hill: The Good Book Company, 2014), 110.

Or we will try excessive fasting, and feel that our prayers are only heard if we are brought low. Or that we have to really feel something to have that access. Or we will think that more words, more passion, more tears will get the prayers there.

Or maybe we have to make a deal: so we make all kinds of promises about how we'll do better in the future, like "I'll be real good if you answer this prayer."

That's different than our approach if we already have access and He's already appeased.

In the Old Testament, there was a time when the prophet Elijah set up a contest with the prophets of a false god, Baal, to see whose God would answer their prayers with fire to consume a sacrifice. And look at how the prophets of Baal prayed:

1 Kings 18:26-29 "And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, [they prayed long enough] saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. [they seemed broken enough] 27 And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." 28 And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. [they afflicted themselves, they offered their god blood] 29 And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

They prayed like they weren't near. Like they didn't know him. Like they had to gain access. Like he needed blood before he'd hear. There was no peace with God, and they had to somehow earn a peace to be heard.

This is different than already having access, already being near. We don't need to pray many words or pray just right to get our prayers heard. We don't need to sacrifice and somehow afflict ourselves to be heard. We don't

need to offer him something first so he'll hear our cries. We are already near. We already have peace.

This is the beauty of the Gospel message: not that we work our way to God, but that He came to us to make peace. He took the punishment, he took the affliction, he did the work.

And now, risen from the grave, he takes us by the hand and brings us into the presence of His Father where we stay near forever.

But I'm such a disaster! He hears me?

Those are the only kinds of people He does hear!

"He comes to us in the brokenness of our health, in the shipwreck of our family lives, in the loss of all possible peace of mind, even in the very thick of our sins. He saves us in our disasters, not from them. He emphatically does not promise to meet only the odd winner of the self-improvement lottery. He meets us all in our endless and inescapable losing."³

Robert Farrar Capon

We could never dare to approach God on our own, no matter how low we bow or how much blood we spill or how high we climb on the self-improvement ladder. But Jesus has made the introduction.

So, Hebrews says:

Hebrews 4:16 "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

We can run to him in confidence all the time. This verse says we run to Him not only for help but for mercy.

We need mercy when we've sinned. When we sin, we can still approach Him in confidence that He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us

³ Robert Farrar Capon, [The Astonished Heart](#). (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). 15.

from all unrighteousness. So often we run away from Him in shame and fear. We think we have to wait long enough or at least be doing well enough for awhile before we approach Him again. Like we only have cordiality and a fragile peace at best. But the peace the gospel brings is robust and sturdy, we can't topple it over with our failures. It is not fragile.

Jesus is a friend to sinners, not an enemy. He is a God who has been appeased by the suffering of Christ, we don't need to make ourselves suffer for sin to earn his love and attention.

Even when we've failed *again*.

This is something we often miss. We have a standard narrative for the Christian life that many of us believe. It goes like this: in the past I was a sinner. I was a rebel against God. Jesus came and paid the price for my sins. I believed, I repented, I was cleaned. (GOOD SO FAR!) And ever since, I've been a good person and walked closely with God without big failures - those are in my past.

And as churches, we're pretty good at forgiving past sins, and welcoming those who failed back before their conversion. But if someone fails big since conversion, we almost don't know what to do.

Capon again writes:

"... don't tell me the church welcomes sinners. I know better. It welcomes only sinners who repent and then never seriously need forgiveness again."⁴

— **Robert Farrar Capon**

The idea that we never seriously need forgiveness again isn't the Christian's story. It's more like a Marvel superhero origin story. Before I was one way, but then I got bit by the radioactive Jesus spider, and ever since I've been slinging webs and fighting bad guys.

Our sins are all in the past, our transformation happened, and we've been OK and not in need of grace anymore.

⁴ Robert Farrar Capon, Kingdom, Grace, and Judgment. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). 128.

But that isn't our story. We continue to fail and sin. Which is why we confess our sins to God individually and together. It's why we need to hear the Gospel preached again and again.

To remind us that our sins, even the recent ones, do not take away our peace with God. They can rob that peace of God, we can feel the guilt and shame and the not being on the same page with Him. But Christians don't lose our access. If we confess He forgives, and does not need us to appease Him. We approach him boldly, even for mercy.

Take a second and take that in: think how ridiculously and scandalously forgiving He is, and how he grants in the place of hostility and abiding peace. He has been so good. And He is even better.

The Holy Spirit

So He has given us peace, access, and even greater, the presence of the Holy Spirit:

Romans 5:3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Not only do we have a legal peace. Not only do we have personal access. But we have The Spirit of God with us. The Holy Spirit is God Himself, the third person of the trinity, and He is ours, pouring God's love into our hearts.

The Spirit of God is really with you. It's not just that God's thoughts are with you, it's not just that someday in the future you'll be with God, He is with you now if you are a Christian.

This is promised to all who believe, with no other conditions. There aren't some Christians who have the Spirit with them and others who don't. (Verse 5 - the Spirit *has been given to us*.) He's with you. Forever. (Now we can grieve him, or fail to be filled with the Spirit. But He never ceases to be with us.)

Which makes it strange that so much of our relationship with the Spirit looks like an attempt to conjure Him or get Him to show up. Sometimes we think that the right kind of worship or prayer will properly make way for the Spirit to come to us. Like we need a Christian rain dance to get Him to fall.

But verse 5 says He is already ours.

In John 16, Jesus said it this way:

John 16 7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

“If I go, I’ll send Him.” And Jesus went. He went to the cross, and sent the Spirit. So He’s with us.

Our response to Him does matter, but it’s important to see that - not because of our works, not because of our obedience, not because of our worship, not because of our passion or attunedness, but only because of the cross, only because of the grace of Jesus, the Spirit is with us.

Jesus doesn’t promise that we’ll always feel the Spirit’s presence or that God will never feel far. He’s giving these promises in large part to equip his disciples for incredible hardship where God could certainly feel far, or where they could easily convince themselves He has abandoned them. He’s not saying you’ll always feel these things, He is saying they’re true and we need to know that, especially when it doesn’t feel true or He doesn’t feel near.

The Spirit is with us forever. We aren’t forgotten. And we aren’t rejected.

Reconciliation

So we have peace, access, the Spirit, and we have received reconciliation.

Romans 5:10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in

God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

The fact that we are reconciled goes even further than peace or access. It is a term that is rarely used in other religions⁵ to describe the relationship of God with man because it is far too personal. It's used to describe a wife and husband that are estranged coming together again.

But Paul uses this term again and again to describe what God does, He is a God who reconciles with people:

***Colossians 1:21* "21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,"**

He is describing polar opposite realities: we were hostile enemies and made like a reconciled bride. We've gone from terrorists fighting against God to being His wife.

It's a completely new reality:

2 Corinthians 5 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

We are made new in Christ and the relationship with God is new.

God is a gracious and merciful God who takes His hardened enemies and makes peace, gives access, promises to always be with them, and in a sense marries them. This is what God is like.

For those of you who are not Christians today, maybe you haven't been interested in Him because you've had a totally different idea of who He is. That He only wants to shoot the arrow at you. Or that the way to get to Him is to appease Him by your doing all kinds of religious works. And that the

⁵ Doug Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 311..

best you could ever hope for is an icy silence and fragile peace and a “maybe I could get to heaven someday.”

But God came to you in love. You shot your weapons at Him, but He died on the cross to absorb his own counterstrike. And what He calls you to today is to repent: to lay down your arms, lay down your resistance, lay down your right to control your own life, and turn to Him believing in what He did for you. And when you do, without your paying a dime, you are given a lasting peace, and access, and His Spirit, and the closest of all possible relationships.

He isn't Baal, He's Christ.

And Christians, we become like the God we worship.

James K.A. Smith has a book called “You Are What You Love”⁶, and that conveys the reality that we become like what we love the most.

When we worship Him, we grow to resemble Him.

And in 2 Corinthians Paul says God has reconciled us. And made us reconcilers.

2 Corinthians 5:18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We start to resemble Him in the mission to reconcile people to God.

⁶ James K. A. Smith, [You Are What you Love](#). (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

We live to introduce others to the God who is this good so they can be reconciled through the cross too.

And just as God forgives and brings together, we become people who are quick to forgive and make peace.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9)

The peacemakers will be called the sons of God! A son of God is someone who has the characteristics of God. You probably have some of the characteristics of your earthly father, and if you are a son of God, you have the characteristics of God.

Just as Christ laid down his life to make that peace between us and the Father, we are his children, and give our lives to make peace between people and God, between people and one another, and between people and us.

So what does it mean for us to be peacemakers?

[Matthew 5:43-45](#) gives our best insight on that:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Jesus thinks of peacemaking as doing all the acts of love it takes to overcome the enmity with other people. Relentlessly love people, give to them, exhaust your emotional resources on them, even if they use you and don't return it.

God gives the sun to give life to all of earth. But some people worship the sun. Some people use its energy to spend their lives ignoring the God who gave it. Some people use the sun to grow heroin that enslaves thousands.

But what does God do every morning? He causes the sun to rise!

So a peacemaker is someone who gives and gives and gives and loves and loves and loves, even when you're used, to try to overcome enmity.

But what if people take advantage of you? They might, but it's probably better to err on the side of mercy and love than never being burned.

Do you want to stand before God and say, "I was never taken advantage of and never fooled, never backstabbed?" Or do you want to say, "God, I pursued people with your love. I ran after them. Yeah, they used me and lied to me and deceived me, but I wanted to be like you. And you're a God who just keeps giving and giving and giving even though the whole earth rejects you."

We will need this here. For our church, our story will not be a story of nobody sinning against each other. It will not be the story of relationships that never get torn, nobody ever gets offended, nobody sins and stumbles.

But my hope is that our church community will ooze Gospel and we will see reconciliation happen all the time: people who were at each other's throats are eating together on Thanksgiving. Marriages that seemingly ended in divorce are reunited, reconciled. People are united who previously had backgrounds that would have set them at odds - the oppressed and oppressors become brothers.

We will be a community with lots of scars, that is inevitable. But how great would it be if we had lots of scars from one another, and lots of stories of reconciliation that went with those scars.

God is all about reconciliation.

And I hope it will be what we are all about as well.

And we can be confident that that can happen. That when we sin against each other, it doesn't have to be terminal. We can have faith that Jesus loves unity and forgiveness and reconciliation, because he loves the things that reflect his glory. So we don't have to assume every time we're sinned against that "there goes another friendship, there goes another good Christian community, there goes another church, there goes my marriage." Jesus loves the things that reflect his gospel, and reconciliation and healing with each other here is the closest thing we've got.

Let's forgive in a way that paints a picture of Christ's love.

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Bulletin Notes:

Romans 5:1-11

Peace

I. Peace with God (Romans 5:1)

II. Access to God (Romans 5:2)

III. The Spirit of God (Romans 5:5)

IV. Reconciliation with God (Romans 5:10-11)

Questions for Small Group Discussion:

1. Discuss the C.S. Lewis quote, "Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms."
2. How is it significant that God does not need to be appeased (for a Christian)?
3. How does God's Spirit give us confidence that we are sons and daughters of God?
4. Discuss the title of a recent book, You Are What You Love. What could that mean for how we grow as Christians?
5. What does it mean that Christians are agents of reconciliation?