

Introduction

At the age of about 30, a woman named Peggy Harper noticed silver gray lines in her hair. It troubled her to be turning gray at such an early age. Her husband, Paul, began calling her Silver Girl. That name made its way into a song he wrote. Simon sang it with Art Garfunkel. The line went, "Sail on, Silver Girl, sail on by; your time has come to shine." The song became one of the biggest hits in American history. "Bridge Over Troubled Water" is loved and enjoyed by people all over the world. Troubled water abounds in life and people long for peace. We turn this morning to the subject of peace as fruit of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christ's disciples. And our text tells of ... troubled water ... to which Jesus spoke peace. And the result was a great calm.

[Read text and Pray]

The account we have just now read depicts two marvelous aspects of the person of Jesus. We see him in power and we see him at peace. We see him in his power exerting peace on the earth. Power and peace are tightly connected to one another. And both pertain to our own peace.

A colossal storm had suddenly blown up while Jesus and a number of disciples were making their way across the Sea of Galilee. The waves were such that they were breaking into the boat and filling it with water. The disciples were filled with fear and anxiety, so they frantically awakened a sleeping Jesus. He did not even appear to care that they were about to die.

Jesus, whose restful slumber was disturbed by the distraught disciples, awoke and spoke. He exerted his sovereign control over the wind and the sea. He turned them from tumult to tranquility. To do so, he uttered the word, "Peace!" Actually, it is the command to be silent, as in "Silence!" Or Hush!" The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. This was truly remarkable. Normally the wind dies down and waves only gradually diminish. On this occasion, however, the wind and the waves were abruptly arrested and there was such a calm that Mark says there was a "great calm."

In this text the disciples depict for us the opposite of peace. Jesus represents the epitome of peace. And that great calm gives a sense of what peace is. Yet the concept bears a bit of complexity. As we study scripture, we find that there are three kinds of peace. And that is where we begin this morning.

I. Three Kinds of Peace.

Peace itself is represented graphically in the account of Jesus and the disciples as a great calm. For a definition of peace, we might turn back to the Old Testament word, shalom. It speaks of an absence of conflict and disorder, but it also communicates wholeness, prosperity, fullness, and safety. And as we survey the scriptures we see this idea in three distinct categories or kinds, each with its own emphasis.

First, there is upward peace which is peace with God. It is peace in a vertical direction. Second, there is inward peace, the inward tranquility of soul. It is peace centrally within one's own self. And third, there is outward peace of harmonic and cordial relations between fellow human beings. This is horizontal peace. Here are three distinct types of peace, yet they are integrally related to one another. As we will see, upward peace is the ground of inward peace and outward peace. The Spirit of God is involved in each of the three.

Let's focus first on ...

II. Upward Peace.

Upward peace has regard to the human relationship with God. When God created the first man and woman, there was peace. The stage was set for a life of tranquil flourishing in the garden of Eden. Life in the garden was characterized by shalom. There was fellowship with the Lord as he walked with the couple in the garden in the cool of the day. It is difficult for us to imagine the harmony and tranquility of those days. They were days of great calm. And the two humans had known nothing else.

The peace of the garden and peace with God were brought to a sudden and abrupt termination by sin. The couple disobeyed God's one clear prohibition. In effect they turned against God. They acted in hostility toward God and declared war on God. Harmony was destroyed. An offense had been committed. Now human beings and God were at cross-purposes. There could be no peace. Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden and prohibited from taking from the tree of life. They had acted pridefully, believing they were better judges than God of how to pursue their shalom. God opposes the proud, and so they had set themselves in opposition to Him. As a result there came enmity and conflict into the now ripped and torn fabric of the divine-human relationship. Peace of all kinds was destroyed. Those born of Adam would not know the way of peace on their own.

Sin is the destroyer of upward peace. To sin is to act in the ongoing destruction of upward peace. And that leaves human beings in a bad place, a helpless place. If there is to be peace between God and humans, it must be brought about by God. And it has been brought about by God. God sent his own Son, called the Prince of Peace, to make peace between himself and the people of his grace.

Paul expresses this aspect of the work of Jesus Christ in Ephesians 2:14-17. He writes of Christ, "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in the place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near."

Paul is explaining how Christ has brought peace where there was a great divide among peoples. The mosaic law produced a division between Israelite and Gentile. Jesus Christ broke down that dividing wall by abolishing the law. That law which divided served the function of demonstrating our need for Christ. Now that Christ has come, the law has been fulfilled and believers in Christ are no longer under it. Among those who turn to Christ in faith, the horizontal division between people groups has been erased.

And what's more, Christ has also broken down the dividing wall of hostility between those folks and God. He has reconciled us to God through the cross. Reconciliation is the work which Christ accomplished. He RECONCILED us to God. He removed the enmity, the estrangement, the animosity. Christ's death on the cross is what killed the hostility. It is through the sacrificial work of Christ that the wrath of God has been satisfied. In effect, Jesus spoke to the winds and waves of the wrath of God; he commanded, "Peace. Be still." There is now a great calm, and we who belong to Christ through faith have peace with God. Christ Jesus absorbed the penalty we merited, the death which was our wages. And now with the removal of the alienation, believers in Christ are granted to experience real and true shalom—peace.

And so Christ died on the cross to bring peace between sinners and God. That peace comes only to those who identify with Christ through faith in him. We must rest our hope for reconciliation with God on the merits of Christ's work on the cross and rising again. It is by faith that we become reconciled. It is by faith that we might have peace with God. Paul writes the Romans (5:1-2), "Therefore, since we have been justified BY FAITH, we have PEACE with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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." Not only do we have peace, we also have eternal access. Having peace, we are destined to share in the glory of God. Apart from peace through Christ, we have the grave expectation of facing the wrath of God. But along with peace between us and God, we have the joyful hope of looking forward to the glory of God in the new heaven and new earth.

Before I go any further this morning, I must ask everyone in this room, "Do you have peace with God?" Because if you do not have peace with God, you cannot have real peace at all. You can try to hide from reality and pretend you have peace, but it cannot keep you from ultimately standing before God in the day of judgment and being sentenced to an eternity of justice. Eternity is a long, long, long time while your life on earth is but a vapor. Any peace you may think you have whilst just a vapor, will be completely overtaken and forever overshadowed by an eternity of tumult, terror, and unrest where there is ceaseless weeping and gnashing of teeth, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. You cannot have true peace when you know that is what awaits you. And it awaits all who do not escape such condemnation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. You can only have true peace in life if you have peace with God. And if you have peace with God, then you can have peace of other kinds as well.

The experience of peace with God is produced by the Spirit of God through the knowledge that Christ has died and has risen, and that we are united with him through faith. And if we have upward peace, we can have inward peace and outward peace.

Let's turn next to ...

III. Inward Peace

Here our text provides significant insight. For when we seek to express the nature of inward peace, we might say it is the opposite of the fear and anxiety experienced by the disciples in the boat when the storm was raging. It was quite an alarming situation. There was a great windstorm. The waves were breaking into the boat, and the boat was filling with water. The circumstances were frightening. The lives of everyone on board appeared to be in danger. They thought they might die, and they were afraid. The disciples were not at peace.

The summer before last, Melissa and I celebrated our 35th wedding anniversary by going to Mackinac Island. It is an interesting place. There are no motor vehicles on the island. You either walk, bike, ride on horseback, or ride in a horse-drawn carriage. You arrive either by boat or plane. That being said, the island is the destination each year for a sailboat race that begins in Chicago and travels northward through Lake Michigan. So as we were walking in to town one morning we were joined by a man who had been part of the race and had landed on the island the night before. He could not keep to himself the story of what had happened during the race. A terrible storm had blown up on the lake, and it would not pass on. It engulfed the racers and stayed with them for about 8 hours. The waves were enormous; the lightening was relentless; and the winds reached gusts of over 60 miles an hour. It was a harrowing experience and he was clearly glad just to be alive.

It would seem the disciples were feeling a lot like that, perhaps even worse. It was far from that peaceful, easy feeling the old song talks about. Inwardly each man felt like the boat they were in; they were tossed about and severely at unrest.

Meanwhile, the epitome of total inward peace was in the boat with them. All commotion was breaking loose. The disciples were frantically working to keep the boat afloat, and Jesus was asleep ... on a cushion. Now that is peace! The fullness of his peace made the disciples accuse him of not caring. Between the disciples and Jesus we observe examples of what inward peace is and what it is not.

Inward peace is based on having peace with God. But there's more. Inward peace is the internal rest of soul, an inward calmness, that stems from the deep-seated conviction that "everything is going to be okay." It is not the conviction that everything is going to be like my flesh would like it. It is not the conviction that I will be delivered from all trouble and affliction in the immediate future. It is the conviction that God is in control and he is working out his glorious purposes, all of which are good for his people as well.

Peace derives from the conviction that as my Father God truly loves me and only does what will make me more like Christ and glorify his name. Here is no-doubt why Jesus was not only able to sleep but was fearless and unflappable despite the circumstances. The Father had a plan, and the most challenging aspect of life in any given day was only going to be used as a part of fulfilling that plan. No storm was going to keep him from preaching the kingdom. No storm was going to interfere with the culmination of his ministry to die on a cross and rise victoriously from the dead.

Unlike Jesus we do not know what our lives will be like. There is uncertainty that faces us every day. There is so much that we don't know. And trouble especially threatens our rest when we adopt our plans, our hopes, our thoughts about the future, and interruptions come. The unexpected happens. Health issues happen. Job circumstances change. Storms blow up. Afflictions and suffering invade. We will not know the outcomes of all these various circumstances. And that uncertainty and subjection to things we cannot control tempts us to fear. It tempts us toward anxiety. Like the disciples we are tempted to feel like we are perishing and we may wonder whether God even cares. Our peace can be easily fractured and replaced with the frenetic unrest of worry, as though that can change things and make them better.

But remember what Jesus said in the sermon on the mount. "I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, not about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"

Why is it that our inward peace is shaken up? In a word it is a lack of faith. We refuse to believe that God is in control with his very good purposes. We act like we have a stronger impact on our life circumstances than God. We also refuse to believe that God really cares. We are like the disciples when they came to Jesus, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" The absence of peace is the exposure that our faith is oh so small if it exists at all. Jesus rightly asks the disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Inward peace is a part of the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces. He works it in us as we walk in the Spirit. But let me highlight three key components that are inseparable from the work of the Spirit.

First is faith. We must trust the Lord. Trusting the Lord day by day is grounded in the belief that God is sovereign. He exercises control over all things. He guides them to fulfill his wonderfully ordained purposes. And not only is he sovereign, he LOVES his children. He is a Father like no other. He knows what we need, and he is able to do whatever it takes to provide for the need. We must believe these truths or we will panic when the wind begins to blow and the waves begin to break over the sides of our lifeboat. So there is faith.

But second, there must be prayer. Prayer is faith in action. In their fear at least the disciples came with intercession to Jesus. Consider, Paul's instruction to the Philippians. This is chapter 4:6-7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, ... let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." If you want to enjoy the peace of God, you must be in prayer to God. Do not expect peace if you do not pray.

And third, there must be thanksgiving. In everything by prayer and supplication WITH THANKSGIVING let your requests be made known. Thanksgiving is key. It looks backward and sees evidence of God's sovereignty, evidence of his care, evidence of his provisions. It looks forward and by faith thanks God for what he will do. And when you pray with thanksgiving to God, you can know this. You could do more but you certainly could not do any less than the most important thing you could do with any problem, affliction, or storm. Take it to the Lord. He is the only one who knows the circumstance as it truly is. And he is the only one who can truly do whatever is necessary to accomplish his best in the midst of it.

So walk in the Spirit. Commune with God in his word, in prayer, and in faith. Your sense of upward peace with God will be nourished and will feed your experience of inward peace from God.

Lastly, let consider even if very briefly ...

IV. Outward Peace

The fruit produced by the Spirit in terms of peace is first upward, then inward. This peace also spreads outward into our relationships with others. Just as the Spirit of God works through us to love others, he also works through us to be at peace with others. The Spirit produces what God's word commends and commands. Matthew 5:9 tells us, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Romans 12:18 instructs us, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." Romans 14:19 exhorts, "So then let us pursue what makes for peace." Hebrews 12:14 directs us to "strive for peace with everyone." Relational peace is part of what the Spirit of God is seeking to produce in each of Christ's followers.

What is relational peace? Well, it is not compromise of truth. Peace with others can only go as far as others will allow it. And striving for peace does not mean a sacrifice of righteousness. However, it does mean that we exhibit an eagerness to maintain unity. It does mean we treat others with respect. It does mean being patient with them. It does mean being sensitive to the opinions and preferences of others. Obviously it means being at war with the devil, the world, and the flesh. But it will mean trying NOT to be at war with others.

Jonathan Landry Cruse writes, "Peace is not at the cost of truth or godliness, but it can be at the cost of our own comfort, reputation, perhaps even safety. The hand of peace never reaches for the weapons of this world, whether they be physical clubs or Facebook comments. The hand of peace reaches to restore: reaching out to heal those who are wounded, even if they deserved it.

Peacemaking knows nothing of revenge— something that never belongs to us, no matter what wrongs are done to us.” (60-61)

It is the work of the Spirit to make us ready to make up when we have offended. We must be ready to reconcile when conflict has erupted. We must be ready to forgive when another comes with contrition to us. These are things we must do, remembering it is the Spirit who produces the fruit in us. Pursue it yet submit. Be a peace-maker whilst knowing the peace-maker is at work in us. Again, we must walk by faith. We must pray. And we must give thanks in the midst of obedience.

Conclusion

Troubled water is a fact of life. Jesus alerted us that in this life YOU WILL HAVE TROUBLE. But Jesus also offers this comfort and assurance to those who trust in him. “Take heart; I have overcome the world.” He is more than bridge over troubled water. He does comfort his people through his Spirit. But to the troubled water of God’s wrath, he has spoken peace. And in the troubled water of life he assures us not only that he will be with us but that he will bring his people through. He has overcome the world. And his is true and lasting peace.

In their song, Simon and Garfunkel promised to be a bridge over troubled water, but they were really not there for each other. Theirs has been a tumultuous relationship involving conflict and disharmony and multiple breakups. What they could do with their voices they would not do with their lives. To some degree we all fail at being there for one another when times are tough. But there is One who will never fail you. His name is Jesus. And he is more than a bridge; HE IS PEACE. Rest in him.