

“You’re a Piece of the Peace”

Romans 12:9-18

Sermon Series: The Missing Peace Week 4 Peace with Others

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Good morning friends! I am grateful to be here sharing God’s Message with you today. I so miss seeing you all -- worshiping together, enjoying fellowship, sharing a hug. I can’t wait for the days when we can be together again! I hope you’ve been able to join in our January Missing Peace Sermon Messages. It’s been a great series, full of powerful teachings and practical advice from the Bible on how to experience true peace with God, ourselves and our families. This week we’re focusing on Peace with others -- our neighbors, classmates, those around us.

OK...Peace with others. Well, let’s see -- we’re in the middle of a global pandemic. Financial crisis. Just went through a contentious election. How exactly do we promote peace with others when there’s so much unease and dissension in our world? As I was working on my Message, I decided to clean out some shelves in the basement (clearly I am a MASTER procrastinator). There, collecting cobwebs on a top shelf, I unearthed a big bag; my 21 year old Y2K Emergency Kit. For those of you who are a bit younger, Y2K was the crisis of our day. Computers were only programmed through the 1900’s; what would happen when the date flipped from 1999 to 2,000? Would every computer on the planet blow up and the world come to a screeching halt? Nobody knew! Instead of hoarding toilet paper, we prepped emergency bags just in case the power grid shut down and we were stuck at home for a year! Hmm. Fast forward 21 years and we’ve got electrical power, but we are pretty much stuck at home...Cautiously opening the bag, I found lots of critical stuff stashed away -- medicine and toiletries way past their expiration date, little tiny clothes for my now really big and grown children, and a very nice surprise - my well-loved Good News Bible. I forgot I put that in there! Paging through to the inside back cover, I saw neatly captured in my school girlish handwriting - Romans 12 - the very scripture passage I was writing a message on. I had also underlined the chapter in red and starred it! I’ve known for years how God calls us to live and when some 20 years later I’m asked to give a Message on peace with others, God sends me down the basement to remind me! Just like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, I’ve had the power all along. We’ve had the power all along.

Let me share those powerful words in Romans 12: 9-18. I’m reading from the New Living Translation.

Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble and keep on praying. When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them, pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all! Never

pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Romans 12:9-18

Wow. There is a lot packed into those ten verses. The Apostle Paul is writing here to the mostly gentile church in Rome, presenting the basic statement of the Gospel and how God calls us to live. To begin with, God calls us to really love people -- no faking it. To get in the weeds with others -- to mourn with them when they are sad; rejoice with them when they are happy. And God doesn't want us to just give lip service, God wants our love to be genuine, with actions backing up our words. Why do we find really loving others so hard? We might find it pretty easy to show love to those who think like us, look like us, live like us. But once we're out of our comfort zone -- it's hard. We're uncomfortable. "It's not safe to go into the city or help in another country," we justify. We'll stay here and send "thoughts and prayers."

Now on the other hand - hey it's easy to rejoice, to celebrate success with someone who is happy, right? Or can jealousy and envy sometimes get in the way of really celebrating with others? Maybe a snide comment escapes our mouth rather than a sincere cheer. "I'm so happy you got that new job. You really are a "golden girl," the boss sure loves you. Things always come so easily for you. So great." Am I dripping with sincerity or sarcasm? We're also "so busy" -- maybe we have time to send a quick text to those who are hurting, mourning, but no more. We know they have a lot they're dealing with and they'll probably talk forever and we just don't have the time right now. Do we send an emoji when we really should pick up the phone? God honestly isn't interested in our excuses -- he just tells us to really love others. How? We need to push past ourselves and our own issues and show genuine love to each other.

A good friend of mine has gone through some major difficulties in her life. For many years she had a pretty typical suburban life. Married and living in Yardley, she was an athlete, therapist, volunteer. And then she was hit with three car accidents in a short period and her life drastically changed. No longer able to do the things she normally did, she eventually lost her career, her mobility and her marriage. But what she found changed everything -- in her weakness, she found the faith, love and strength of Jesus. She immersed herself in the Bible and filled herself with God's Word. Her answering machine message now includes bible verses to inspire and uplift others. During the pandemic she takes time to write encouraging cards and call people who are isolated at home. And, as she puts it, "I make the supermarket my church." Before she enters the store she prays that God will use her to bless those He puts in her path. And she follows through with action, making sure to say a friendly greeting to those who cross her path, let a harried mom go in front of her in line, offer a kind word to the busy checkout person. It is not always easy. But that's love in action.

In verse 16, we are called to "Live in harmony with each other." I love the use of the word harmony here. If you've ever sung in a chorus or played in a band or orchestra, you know that harmony is a blending of disparate instruments/voices to produce a beautiful sound together. When Paul calls for unity with one another, he doesn't call us to agree on everything. Dissonant chords in music are made up of sounds that are jarring; different; don't sound like they go together. We certainly don't want those in our beautiful harmonious symphony do we? Actually dissonance adds depth to a musical piece. And shared respectfully, differing opinions can add depth to our relationships and our lives. When we live in **harmony**, we can embrace dissonance,

sharing differing opinions without anger or divisiveness. Or as a friend shared on Facebook, “Peace is not when everyone agrees. It is when we can respect our disagreements and still play in the sandbox together.”

Why do we so often have such a hard time playing in the sandbox with those we disagree with? Perhaps it’s because we care more about being right, more about getting others to see OUR way, than we care about others. Our way is RIGHT and we don’t want to hear any other thoughts or opinions. What if we put down our pride; put down our need to be right and took the time to really listen to each other. To see where we have commonality and allow dissonance/respectful disagreeing to add richness to our conversations and our lives. Stop using angry words and posts to try to get others to come over to “our side”. Let’s be real -- has anyone’s mind ever been changed by an angry post on Facebook?

And we must also remember that peace with others is not simply abdicating/giving up our beliefs to get along with everyone. That’s what I thought when I was younger. Don’t make waves; keep the peace. At all costs. Remember, God calls us to “hate what is evil/wrong” and “hold tightly to what is good.” Not giving up our convictions, but checking our convictions with God’s word and then sharing them respectfully. If we ground ourselves in Christ, demonstrate genuine love, and respectfully engage with one another, the Holy Spirit will grow us so we live in harmony, even in the midst of differences.

And lastly in verse 19, Paul says to not repay evil with evil, but to “do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.”

Always remember that the world is watching us -- especially us. “They call themselves Christians -- are they going to act like their Jesus?” Even when just one person goes against us, what do we portray to the world around us? Here’s a really simplistic illustration -- Think about when you’re driving. It’s not really evil for someone to cut us off, but it might really annoy us, even make us angry. How do we respond? Are our children watching? Our spouse? The friends we’re driving to school? What comes out of our mouths? Anyone else grimacing? On a much broader scale, how do we respond to others we disagree with? On Facebook, Twitter, Zoom -- what are we saying? Do our words, our posts, our tweets shine the light of Jesus or fan the flames of hate and discord? “Will they Know We are Christians by our Love?” Shout out to the late 1960’s hymn!

The work we’ve been doing with this Peace Series is the foundation for loving others -- we must have internal peace with God and ourselves to show external peace to others. If you missed any of the series or feel stuck in any of these places, I encourage you to go back and work through it. You can find replays of the Messages and sermon notes on our website -- www.woodside-church.org/sermons.

In Romans 5:8 Paul reminds us “God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.” Talk about amazing grace! God wants us to breathe in that grace for ourselves, fully accepting it, grounding ourselves in it. When we do that, when we breathe in his grace, we can breathe out love for others. If we stay grounded in God and remember that grace so freely given to us, this will become a natural rhythm -- Breathing in

Grace; Breathing out Love. It will take practice -- like playing an instrument. At first it feels awkward, we make a lot of mistakes and it often sounds awful. With consistent actions, practice, it soon becomes second nature and we join with others playing in harmony -- Breathing in Grace; Breathing out Love -- offering the beautiful love and grace of God to those in our world.

Early one morning a few weeks ago, I tried to capture a picture of the beautiful glowing sunrise peeking through the sky. I grabbed my iphone and snapped a pic. Drat -- the lights from my Christmas tree ruined the shot by reflecting off the window as tiny bursts of light. No, God softly whispered, those tiny bursts of light ARE the picture. A week later, Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman -- all of 22 years old -- reminded us of who we are, what we are called to be, with these words, "There is always light if only we are brave enough to seek it. If only we are brave enough to be it." The Hill We Climb," January 20, 2021.

We are those tiny bursts of light. And the bright everlasting light of Jesus is waiting to shine through us, illuminating all around us.

Who else is ready to be brave?