



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Peace Comes From Within The Eighth Sunday After Pentecost 7182021

I speak to you today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

Earlier this week, I was sitting in the living room of the rectory and Claire was upstairs working in her office when she called down and said, "She came back, the deer came back." And so I turned and I looked behind me on the couch and right through the glass of our little sitting area there, you could see this incredible, beautiful deer that was lying down. She was bedding down for the evening and she was just in that time, that space, where she was completely at peace with her surroundings.

I took out my phone and I took the picture that you have as an insert today. And I've been spending the last couple of days just praying over this image because I found it so powerful, so different. Such an opportunity to take a little time and to meditate and use that image as a kind of meditative prayer. And it captured me because I began to think and mull over in my mind what was the peace that this creature was experiencing at that moment? Because the one thing I would say, if I were to identify an emotion that she was experiencing at that moment, it would be a kind of peace. I know we tend to look at deer and horses and see a kind of inherent nobility because of their long faces, but she's just looking back at me through the window. She feels safe enough to not move. And she feels curious enough to just look at me.

I began to think about that peace that she was feeling, that affection, that emotion of peace. And this peace is something that she did not experience because she had been able to secure her environment or protect it or keep herself safe. She was at that moment as threatened as she always has been. There were predators around. There are coyote moving back into the county. And so she was someone who was not ever going to be in a position where she could somehow secure herself. So her peace was not the product of a sense of safety. You see what I mean? She was simply resting because she had decided to listen to her body and to trust her environment, she decided to rest. It was time to rest and she's lying down and she's at peace.

And I happen to know a bit about deer because my father was a deer hunter. And so I've seen deer in many different ways and I kind of know a little bit about their patterns; their comings and their goings, yeah. And I know that right now, when I see her in that image, she looks like she might be pregnant. And so she's lying because she has to listen to her body because she's about to give birth in just a little bit of time. And she has to conserve her energy. She has to live in dependent of the world around her. To what is happening to her, she has to be attentive to it.

I find this image powerful because when we think about peace, we often think about things like being able to control our environment, somehow keeping ourselves safe or dry, somehow keeping everyone connected to us, unaffected by any of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, keeping our bodies whole, free of disease. But this deer seemed to have none of those things. And yet she was full of peace.

And we also tend to think about peace as some kind of ability to secure the borders around you through power. That is often how we define peace. Back in the day by that I mean, 2000 years ago, the Romans had this saying Pax Romana, which was meant to be the peace of Rome, which was the stability that the Roman Empire was able to exert for 200 years. And so there were no major wars because it was the strongest and largest entity. It was somehow able through threats of violence or sometimes exercises of the same to find a way to keep the peace.

That was replaced in the 19th century by the Pax Britannica, which was a kind of peace that was established by the British Empire when it had reached around and touched every corner of the Earth. In 1945, we had the Pax Americana, and that is the kind of place we are today in which the power of this nation and its powerful military is able to achieve a measure of peace.

Now in raising all of these things, I'm not questioning the fact that we need armies, but rather to identify the fact that the peace that this deer had was nothing of that sort. And I believe her peace was real. And I believe it kind of went with the grain of God. The other way we tend to think about peace is in terms of good negotiation of self-interest of the contracts we can somehow agree to based upon everybody's rational actions. And this is a getting to yes, kind of peace. It had worked for many years in South Africa during the transition to democracy there beginning in the '90s.

But that kind of peace, as important as it is, that kind of working for some kind of agreement, some kind of covenant, some kind of contract, that kind of peace often is unstable and it often deserts us in the times we need it most. And again, I don't want to question whether or not we need to have contracts. But I want to identify the peace that this deer experienced as something different, something more powerful, something that could be our teacher if we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Both of those peaces I talked about, peace as a category of power, peace as a category of contractual obligation, of détente, these are known in Christian thought as the peace of this Earth. It's the peace that sometimes helps us and sometimes doesn't. It's the peace that sometimes represents justice and sometimes doesn't. It's the peace that is always fleeting and dependent and ephemeral, and time-bound, it will pass away. But the peace this deer was experiencing, if for a moment, if for a brief moment, that peace seems to be eternal because it goes with the grain of God, because it listens to her body, because it's attentive and trusts her environment.

The last line of today's hymn, while expressing a kind of confidence in the power of God, there's a kind of trust of God that it speaks to.

There's not a plant or flower below,

But makes Thy glories known
And clouds arise, and tempests blow
By order from Thy throne;
While all that borrows life from Thee
Is ever in thy care
And everywhere that I could be
Thou God art present there

in a weird way, in a powerful way, in an important way that deer on the lawn resting represented the kind of peace that lives in radical trust. And that has a kind of understanding and a kind of participation in a web of being in God. And you and I over the past year and a half, we've experienced tempests, both real and metaphorical. You and I have experienced clouds, real and metaphorical. So many of us have had to deal with disease in powerful ways.

Many of us have gotten sick with the pandemic, or sick because of things associated with it. So many of us have experienced tempests in the form of actually experiencing a loss of property and a damage to our property because of the actual rain, the tempest that hits us, and many of us have experienced tempests in a number of form when death descends upon us, and we know our world as vulnerable and fragile. In all of these things, we need the peace of God and that peace is different from the earthly peace. It only comes from God.

Now, if you have heard any sermon on peace in the biblical tradition, in the Christian tradition, I'm sure that you have heard that the peace that we believe in as Christians and set our hopes upon is Shalom. It's contained in the Hebrew word Shalom, which is a kind of peace that is the presence of God found in right relationship. And that is true. But I want to say something more about that because to truly experienced that right relationship isn't just to have a kind of conceptual achievement in your mind, but a kind of transformation in your heart. It's the kind of decision to step into the kind of relationship that God has presented to you this day and always.

So I want to say three things about peace today that go with the grain of the ratings before us. And the first is that peace begins with trusting in God and a kind of resignation to God's incredible providence and power and presence in your life. And of course you see that in our reading from Jeremiah in which there is a kind of question about the shepherd of the sheep and how there have been unfaithful shepherds. And now a faithful shepherd is coming to the fore. And the purpose of that whole passage is to underscore and to invite us to ask the question, who is our shepherd? Who do we put our trust in? Who will guide us when we're facing death and disease? Who will guide us when we're experiencing anxiety and troubles? Who will be the shepherd that gathers the sheep, the shepherd that leads us?

And the answer time and time again is God. God is our shepherd and only God is worthy of our trust. We see an echo of this in the beautiful rendition of Psalm 23 by Bobby McFerrin where we read:

"The Lord is My Shepherd, I have all I need
He makes me lie down in green meadows
Beside the still waters, He will lead."

In all of these things there is trust. And so the first step in making this peace of God promised in the scripture yours is by taking a step and trusting God, letting your shoulders drop, admitting your sense of powerlessness and stepping into the environment God is leading you through.

The second thing I want to say is that peace begins with our bodies and not with our environment. In other words, peace has to begin within us. This is perhaps a kind of interrupting thought to some of you, because for many, many years, the church has been mobilized to make political statements. And I think there's nothing wrong with that necessarily, but we need to keep in mind that anything we bring outside the walls of this church has to come from a kind of conversion that is inside of us. Peace begins within us. It doesn't matter where we are called to be. It doesn't matter who we are called to be so long as we know whose we are and Christ is in us.

This is the kind of import of our reading from the gospel today from Mark, because you have this incredible passage from Mark in which you have to passages. One Jesus says, hey, let's go on retreat. You all are working so hard. Come on, pack up. We're going to go someplace deserted. We're going to get away from it all. And the disciples say, sounds good. And they go with Jesus. And as soon as they do, He's just inundated with people.

I know that my family knows exactly this experience where it always seems that there's something I have to do the minute I try to go on vacation. And what the gospel says is that the peace that Jesus is inviting the disciples to is not going to be dependent upon the environment around them. They will be crushed on every side by people hoping just to touch His cloak so that they might find healing. And that is as it should be, for we all will constantly crave to be in the presence of Christ. But the peace, which the disciples experience is the presence of Christ with them, whether they are on retreat or completely engaged and immersed.

The third thing I want to emphasize today is that peace happens when Christ lives in you. By that, I mean, peace moves from the inside out and not the outside in. And this is found in a beautiful way in our reading from Ephesians, in a passage, which is one of my favorites that I've ever read.

“But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh, in his body, he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. So he can preach peace to those who are far off, and those who are near.”

In this incredible, wonderful description of Jesus, He is the peace of God because Jesus is the perfect presence of God. And when Jesus is present, distances close and hostility ends, and walls come down and we are one. And this is the miracle of what it means to be a Christian is to have peace inside of you. This is the thing that the earliest writings of the Christian Church testified to, again and again, they were surrounded by an empire that was collapsing. They were experiencing the dislocation of roads that had become unsafe to cross upon for fear of being set upon by brigands. They're experiencing differences and disagreements and doctrinal divisions in their church. And yet time and time again, the promise of God is that the peace of God is with them through the presence of Christ.

So you and I have work to do, we cannot have by nature the kind of peace the deer had that I saw the other day. That deer was always obeying her nature. And by listening to her body, she knew exactly what to do. You and I, we live by grace because we've messed up our nature and we need help. We need grace to find our way to that peace that goes with the grain of the universe. And so that peace is my hope for us today. That peace is something I wish for you. And for me, as we experience the tempests and clouds, so many of us are experiencing. That peace is something I hope begins in you and me through Christ.

Amen.