



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

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*The Fruit of the Spirit: Peace - The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost - 6/28/2020*

## [Lessons for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost](#)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The other day I was deeply agitated and very upset. And so, I called my sister because I needed someone to talk to. "What happened?" my sister asked me, "Why are you so upset?" Now, I certainly could have offered a myriad of answers of what could have possibly agitated me. It could have been this virus that refuses to leave us alone, infecting us all around the world and even in our own backyard, or it could have been the crazy roller coaster of a ride that we seem to be on with closing down everything and then opening and then closing and large swaths of this country, trying to figure out how to manage to do it all.

Or it could be that I was upset over all the agony that it seems that people of color are facing whether it's through oppression or through losing their lives. And the difficulty people of different races are facing as they learn how to live with one another in these troubling times and help each other thrive. It could have been because of the uncertainty of an economy that is attempting to try to make a way through a pandemic that seems insistent on breaking everything down. None of those things were the things that upset me.

So I said to my sister, "Costco promised to deliver a package for Miles's 16th birthday. And it was his big present and it didn't come and it's not coming. And I don't know where it is and they haven't put anything on the website, so I can't figure it out. And now he's going to have the 16th birthday in the midst of COVID, where we can't even go out and be with friends, and he's not going to get his big present. Can you believe it?"

And my sister after a couple of moments, as she thought deeply about what to say to me, finally said two wonderful words, "Calm down." Now, I don't know what happens to you when somebody tells you to calm down, but I said to her, I will not calm down and I got even more agitated and irritated. And it makes me wonder why I call my sister when I'm upset. She tends to be not the touchy feely

sort. But it also made me wonder how do we remain calm in the midst of a turmoil? How do we find comfort and peace when we're in the storm?

I want to talk to you today about two guys who had trouble attempting to understand how to be calm in the midst of a storm, and they were trying to figure that out. These two men are the prophet, Hananiah and the prophet, Jeremiah, and each of them had a different vision of what to do in their time of difficulty and tumult. Actually, they had diametrically opposed viewpoints of what they should do.

And we read from the book of Jeremiah today, a very small excerpt of a pretty grand and difficult story in the history of Israel. The city of Jerusalem for 30 years had been ruled by the Babylonians, the current ruling power and dynasty, and they had two options in the midst of this horrific experience. The King and the people of Jerusalem, they could fight and they could resist the encroaching Babylonians or they could give up and acquiesce to them. So, which one was the right thing to do?

Now, the prophet Jeremiah says what he has been saying for decades to the people of Jerusalem and Israel. It is a lost cause. You have strayed too far from doing what is right, Israel. So give up. Everything has to go. It is best for us to surrender, to prevent any more bloodshed and to start all over and figure out how to live and survive in a new normal, in a new foreign land. Meanwhile, the prophet Hananiah offers an opposite, but equally compelling and convincing argument. He tells the King and the people to fight. He says, God will be with us since we are. God's chosen people. And he predicts that after two long, hard years of suffering, that they will prevail over the Babylonians and they will be able to have true peace and keep their land and keep their independence and be able to worship God in the temple built for God in Jerusalem.

Now the prophet Jeremiah listens to the prophet Hananiah and actually offers that he hopes Hananiah is right. Two years is not a very long time in the scheme of things. But, he says, it's time who will tell who is right. Spoiler, it's the one that they named the book after. But the king believes Hananiah and they fight and they lose big time. They lose to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon who sacks Jerusalem, destroys the temple, kills the king's sons in front of his eyes, and then gouges out the king's eyes and throws him in a prison in Babylon where he dies. And the people of Jerusalem are taken from their homes. They're thrown into Babylon, treated as servants, and the temple is destroyed. And the people will not return to Jerusalem after two years but after 70.

This is a strange and disturbing story to use to talk about finding peace in the midst of uncertainty. And yet I was struck, I was struck by the fact that when Hananiah and Jeremiah were making their arguments whether to fight or whether to give up, that actually both of them seemed plausible. There actually was no way of knowing at that point what to believe, what to do, or what the outcome

would be. How are we to remain calm in the midst of a storm when we cannot predict the outcome of the storm?

You know, if we're really honest with ourselves, we'd realize that this is actually the norm. There are no guarantees made to any of us in life, and all of this makes me wonder how can you and I have peace in the midst of a storm? Our peace cannot come from making a right decision or being able to anticipate the future. That's not where our peace is. We cannot have peace from figuring out what the situation is or being calm and secure and predictable in this situation. Our piece has to come from something that is outside those unpredictable parameters.

In the midst of all of these upheavals that have been going on over the past three months, I am realizing that I am not going to find peace unless it is found in something that is not time bound. Peace can only be found in the quiet confidence of what cannot be seen, but what is promised. That God in Christ is saving the whole world and is providing for us and will give to us a day where there will be no more strife, no more evil, no more sickness, no more virus, no more not knowing what to do, but that we will be secure because of the work of God through Jesus Christ. And that is where our peace is found. Not from everyday matters past, present, or future, but in a god who is making the way over the course of all time.

I was reading a wonderful article that was written by the African-American writer and journalist, Donna Britt. She had a 26-year-old brother who was shot to death by police in Gary, Indiana while she was studying at university of Michigan getting her master's degree some 40 years ago. And in this article she was sharing how George Floyd's death brought back the whole entire experience all over again and haunted her anew. But then she saw something she never thought she would see. She saw a nation and the world responding. She saw how everyone seemed to share in her horror and outrage, and everyone seemed to believe that we as human beings, we as Americans, we can do so much better than this.

She wrote, "For someone like me, witnessing this tsunami of multinational empathy has been like watching water thicken into wine – a full blown miracle." She couldn't have predicted this. She may have wanted it, but she probably thought it wouldn't happen in her lifetime. But she knew that should something change, it would be the god that she knew who was changing the tide, the god that she loved, who was moving everyone towards peace and justice and the beloved community, the god who can make miracles and turn water into wine. It was as the prophet, Jeremiah said after the ransacking of Jerusalem. Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.

None of us know how things are going to turn out tomorrow, this fall, five years from now. But we can be calm because we know with quiet certainty that God can make things new. Even if the Babylonians ransack your town, even if they destroy

your temple and take away your homes, even if a deadly virus tries to attack you, even if there are long time structures of oppression that dehumanize people, because God can kill deadly viruses and bring us back into fellowship with one another.

God can dismantle long time structures that are dehumanizing others and God's love for all creatures will prevail in the end. You and I don't need to have an answer today. We simply trust that God will do things to bring about a lasting change. And that is how we can have a peace that surpasses all understanding.

Amen.