



Christ United Methodist Church

Creating committed Christ-followers for the transformation of the world.

Psalm 106
Philippians 4:1-9

Rev. Katy Lee
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“Practicing Imperfect Peace”

Did you know Minnesota was recently voted the happiest state to live in in the country? I mean, OBVIOUSLY right? I guess I would have assumed it was California or Hawaii, or somewhere much more sunny and expensive to live. But no, despite our mosquitoes and cold weather, we apparently are the happiest people. It's hard to measure happiness, of course. It's debatable. They based the surveys off general income: more money makes people happier, but only up to \$75,000 a year, then it tapers off. They took into account people's general health, low levels of depression, people having jobs.

There have also been surveys around the world trying to judge the most happy or content countries in the world: again, we might imagine, the U.S. to be pretty happy, since we are apparently quite great and we have a lot of money and resources. Or maybe we would imagine Australia or Morocco or France to be the happiest, places with great food. But no: what came up was little, chilly Denmark. So why Denmark? Are Danes just bigger and stronger, do they have more money, is the weather tropical? No. apparently Danish people have one secret: low expectations. They don't expect a perfect government. They don't expect perfect weather. They generally expect things to go wrong and that they won't always have it all together. And they decide that even with everything that goes wrong in life, they will be happy anyway.

This fall at Christ Church we have been talking about “life hacks”, ways that we read about in scripture that help us live well. Today we are talking about practicing peace, where we are hearing some strong encouragement from the Apostle Paul about fixing our eyes on what is good. So, let's take a moment to hear from Paul and think through what this teaches us about living in peace with one another:

My dear, dear friends! I love you so much. I do want the very best for you. You make me feel such joy, fill me with such pride. Don't waver. Stay on track, steady in God.

Pray About Everything

²I urge Euodia and Syntyche to iron out their differences and make up. God doesn't want his children holding grudges.

³And, oh, yes, Syzygus, since you're right there to help them work things out, do your best with them. These women worked for the Message hand in hand with Clement and me, and with the other veterans—worked as hard as any of us. Remember, their names are also in the Book of Life.

⁴⁻⁵Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, *revel* in him! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute!

⁶⁻⁷Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.

⁸⁻⁹Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

Truthfully, this word seems like a ridiculous challenge right now, like a check list of what we are doing wrong and what is hard to do. We spent last week mourning the Las Vegas victims and talking about grief in general, about how stressful and challenging these days are. An article in the New York times this last week talked about how U.S. teenagers seem to be more stressed and anxious than ever before. So how are we supposed to practice peace?

The interesting thing about this letter is that Paul is not writing it from a mountain top, looking down and appreciating the beautiful view of all his successful work. No, he's writing right now from a prison cell, where he is being held under a capital charge. The title of this section in one version says, "you cannot prison the message." He writes about how he has learned to be content in all circumstances, and he must be right, because he is between a rock and a hard place right now. So, what can we learn about peace from Folsom Blues Paul and the apathetic Danes?

We first need to clarify our definitions of peace and expectations about peace. Our expectations are sometimes too fixated on a shallow kind of peace. Shallow because we are content with making ourselves feel temporarily peaceful. We sometimes practice a kind of internal peace that only affects us. It's peace that makes us "feel peaceful", feel better. This isn't bad stuff in itself. We do stuff to lower our blood pressure, that's great. Exercise, yoga, praying, thinking positive thoughts. But if we are so focused on feeling peaceful, we can start to ignore the issues and needs of other people, because it throws off our Zen. This is peace that throws issues under the rug, which avoids conflict to feel secure.

But then when we look past our own feelings, our expectations sometimes get too high, and we dream about PERFECT peace. We start to dream about utopia and world peace and perfect relationships and we are constantly disappointed in each other when we have troubles. We think we can only be peaceful when everything is going right around us.

When Paul is talking about keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, about being good to one another, focusing on what is true and right, and keep the faith, he isn't talking about a shallow kind of feel-good Lifetime movie peace. He is also not talking about a kind of peace we find when everything is going well for a few minutes. He's talking about deep shalom: an ancient Hebrew word that means "wholeness."

Donald Miller wrote a piece about our life with God, and what kind of peace and contentment and wholeness to expect: I think this applies well to us. True sustaining peace, wholeness peace the kind Paul is talking about, starts with you. It starts with us looking inside ourselves and finding contentment. It is contagious peace. Infectious peace. By starting with yourself, taking a look at your life, finding peace with who you are, you begin into an infectious peace. When you dream about who God is making you to be, tell stories of the grace of God in the world, practice hope, take an actual Sabbath day to do nothing, you will be a part of peace that brings you balance and gives you greater grace that spreads into all the world. It's peace that comes from gratitude, gratefulness, self-understanding that gives you more grace towards others. It is a peace that helps you focus and see clearly.

This Wednesday we opened Thrift on Fifth, and it was amazing. It certainly didn't look calm; there was a kind of organized chaos, Girl Scouts running around teaching people games with tape, visitors everywhere trying to figure out which way was "out", more and more clothes being stacked in the bin upstairs. But there is a holy peace in the midst of chaos. The women in charge

were confident in themselves, confident in the mission, confident in the work, and their internal peace rubbed off on everybody else.

When we stop waiting for perfection and utopia and world peace before we experience shalom, we will be a little bit more Danish, and ready to practice imperfect peace.