

St. John's UCC, Fredericksburg
July 22, 2012

**“Seeking Peace”
(Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56)**

A few years ago I was asked to do a wedding ceremony for a college friend at her family's lake house in northeast Pennsylvania. It was a hot, summer day, but the drive was going so well. As I got off my exit on I-81, I came into a big storm. It was raining so hard that I couldn't see the road. I had to pull over in this parking lot where there were other cars that pulled off the road. I quickly realized that I was under some telephone wires and with the thunder and lightning that accompanied this storm, I didn't think this was a safe thing. So I decided to pull out of the parking lot and try to find the lake house. I followed my directions, but I had no luck in finding the proper road. Unfortunately I didn't have any phone numbers, so I just kept driving around in this storm with the hope that I would find the correct road. Well, after driving for more than 30 minutes, I discovered that I kept passing the road. I turned down the road and immediately came upon the lake house.

At this moment I was surprised to see the storm cease and the sun come out. As my friend and her family greeted me, I informed them of my trials for the past 30-40 minutes. My friend invited me to get in the boat and join them for a ride around the lake. I accepted the invitation and was amazed at the peace and quietness after the storm. I was seeking this peace after all that I went through to get there. Isn't this what we are all seeking...the peace and quietness from our chaotic lives?

However, this is not the proper image for God's peace. In receiving God's peace, we are challenged to find God's peace in the midst of the chaos and struggles of life. We

can't run away from the chaos in order to seek the peace, but rather we must confront the chaos and look for the peace there. We can do that because we know that God is with us...that God is constantly touching our lives....that God has brought peace into our hearts through Christ.

We find in our gospel lesson today that Jesus invites the disciples to come to a deserted place and rest for a while because they didn't even have time to eat. Don't we all want to experience that? Maybe some of you have already done so this summer. However, as we often read in the gospel text, the crowd followed them. When they got to shore, Jesus had compassion on them. Jesus then began to teach them, which is very intriguing. These people are alone and in the verses that were excluded for today we learn that they were hungry. It is interesting that we skip over the feeding story and Jesus walking on the water. The explanation of this may be because over the next few weeks we will read an extensive description of these events from John's gospel. The important thing in our passage from Mark today is that Jesus first fed them with the Word and then provided food for them.

This is a call for the Church to put an emphasis on its teaching ministry and to feed people with the Word of God. This is an important reminder for the church today since our educational ministry is failing because we keep trying to do the same old thing. That deserted place was not a place of peace and quiet, but it was a place where ministry was happening. We often say that we come to church to seek peace, but the only way we can seek the peace of God is in the challenges that God places before us. What we are seeking is how to live peaceably in the chaos and struggles of life. The church must feed us with the ways to seek that peaceful living in the midst of what life gives us.

The gospel lesson focuses on the peace within us, but this is not the only form of peace. The epistle to the Ephesians focuses on the peace that we strive to have with another person. Peace is at the core of the epistles. They always begin with the greeting of God's grace and peace. They also usually end with a word of blessing that includes the idea of God's peace to be with the audience.

These early Christians were fighting about everything. The Apostle Paul is addressing the divisions that existed among the Ephesians and reminds them that in Christ we are no longer strangers or aliens, but we are citizens with the saints and are members of the household of God, which is built upon the foundations of the prophets and apostles and with Christ as the cornerstone. The divisions no longer exist. It would be great to live in a world where divisions did not exist, but unfortunately we seem to live in the words of Robert Frost "good fences make good neighbors." We dwell on the divisions. We would rather be at war with others, whether it is locally or globally, rather than be in peace with one another. It is sad to see the war and violence in the very place where Christ ushered in the peace of God. It has been sad to see the violence that occurred in Colorado this week. I am confident that we are all seeking peace at such a tumultuous time.

The letter to the Ephesians tells us that in order for peace to exist there must be a dismantling of the walls and divisions that exist between us. We must remind ourselves that in Christ we are one...we are no longer strangers....no longer enemies. We must allow God to break down the walls and divisions in order to seek peace with one another.

Next week this time I will be with Anne's family in Deering, N.H. for a much deserved vacation. It will be great to be by the lake for about 9-10 days. It will be

peaceful. It will be nice to be away from the challenges and trials of everyday life. However, the important thing for all of us to realize during those peaceful moments of vacation is that when we get to reality we will still be faced with whatever challenges and troubles of our lives. We must seek that peace with God who has brought that peace into our hearts through Christ.

There once was a contest at a county fair for the best peaceful painting. There were three finalists with three very different pictures of peace. The first was a painting of a farm in Wisconsin with the white fences and the bright red barn. The grass was bright green with cows grazing on the tall grass and birds chirping as they fly in the air. The second was a painting of the sun rising over the lake early in the morning. The beautiful colors of the sun rays shining on the water. It was definitely a calm scene with no boats in the water or airplanes in the sky. By now you would probably say that this is a difficult choice to make. The third was a painting of a rushing waterfall with the water going over the rocks for about 200 feet. At the bottom of the waterfall was the yellow arches of McDonald's with the wrappers from the fast food chain spilling out of the trash cans. On one side of the waterfall was the highway with thousands of cars driving by, while on the other side of the waterfall was a campground where people were having a good time and cans of beer were floating into the waterfall. There were jackhammers blasting away concrete. Just near the waterfall there was a big tree with a bird's nest that had 3 eggs and a mother robin sitting on those eggs.

Now think of those three images....which one would you have chosen? Well, you may be surprised to know that it was the last one. It makes sense though in regards to

how we perceive God's peace. It is not to run away from the conflict, but rather to seek God's peace within the chaos and conflict.

One of the memories I will have from camp this summer was sitting in the new vesper area at Hartman Center. As we sat among these tall trees, we were asked to share what we heard. Of course we heard the birds and insects as well as moments of silence. However, in contrast to those peaceful images we heard the cars and trucks on route 322. It reminded me that we simply can't run away from the chaos of life, but we can seek peace in the midst of that chaos with God! Amen.