

# The Way of Peace

MJCF

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Romans 12:9-21

One of the titles people have for Jesus Christ is, “Prince of Peace.” In his example we see someone who did not fight with others. He spoke strongly, but did not argue. He showed care for everyone he met, and although he had the power of the Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth, his miracles were on the level of showing compassion when he healed the sick. Jesus refused to perform huge public miracles, and “wow” people, because his purpose was not to “scare people into God’s Kingdom.” He showed more the way of love and peace. Ultimately, Jesus hung on the cross, dying for our sins so that we can be forgiven and have a right relationship with God. Jesus made peace between us and God, through his sacrifice. He is now risen as Lord of all, and because we have peace with God through him, we are empowered to make peace with people around us, as well as with our environment. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Mtt.5:9) At the time of Jesus there was a huge gap between Jews and non-Jews. The Jews felt they were part of God’s kingdom because they had God’s laws. Those who were not Jews were not saved because they didn’t know about God’s laws. Yet, even Jews could not perfectly follow God’s laws. That’s why Jesus had to come, and it was for both Jews and non-Jews. The apostle Paul says about him,

“For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.” (Ephesians 2:14-16)

Now all people are made one through Christ. No one is above the other because we all are in need of the grace of Christ.

Today’s bible passage describes the characteristics of a true follower of Jesus Christ. I’ll get more deeply into this passage another time. Today, I just want to highlight how love and care for others is a key theme here. The love of God that we experience in our hearts can overflow in our relationships, even in our relationships with strangers. This love can help peace grow between even people who are enemies. This is a deep peace that goes beyond the idea of there just being no war or fighting happening. The biblical concept of peace is summed up in the Hebrew word, “Shalom.” This word means well-being, living well, at peace in our relationships with other people, with our environment, and with God. It is the kind of peace that not only stops wars, it has also has the potential to make enemies into friends. Humanly this often seems impossible, but by the power of Christ at work in us, we have the potential to overcome evil with good. Jesus brings a new way of peace. We naturally want to “get even” with those who hurt us. But this violence against an enemy, even if it’s just the mental violence of angrily avoiding them, only creates more violence. Jesus’ way of peace stops the repetition of violence...

When I lived in Ontario my parents worked at a Christian community centre. I can remember many interesting and sometimes challenging experiences. I remember participating in kids’ clubs at the Centre. One of the favourite things to do was to build things in the wood shop. I’d like to share a story told by my Dad and published in Purpose Magazine last year.

My heart was singing as I traced outlines of donated tools on the workshop wall of our Church and Community Centre — 6 hammers, 6 saws, 6 of everything needed to build bird feeders, toys and other interesting projects. Not only were the tools available for our woodworking classes of kids challenged with poverty situations, but each tool could easily be returned to its designated spot, encouraging good organization.

Entering the Centre one morning all I could do was stare. The wall with its organized chalked out shapes was bare. Every precious tool was missing! The broken window revealed it

all. And we had a pretty good idea who the culprits were — the older teens who hung around at night, causing disturbances.

I was angry — very angry! We were victims! Let's call the police and get these trouble-makers taken care of! Let's cancel our neighborhood program, if that's what people will do around here! Unconstructive feelings dominated my temperament.

Certainly, one of my gifts was the gift of helping to create order and stability, and in so doing bring hope to an aging community devastated by unemployment, crumbling infrastructure and social disorder. With pride I cherished being a calming presence in the midst of a sometimes very chaotic Centre, where problems often spilled into the programs. I knew how a disorderly workshop, where teens would fight for the remaining hammers that were still in their designated spots, could not only abort the completion of a project, but also create damaging tensions in relationships.

Unhelpful thoughts of having the culprits punished had taken over. Clearly I was in a reactionary mode. And sadly, such a stance can nullify the gifts we have so carefully, and wisely nourished.

In our staff meeting a few days earlier we had looked at the creation story. It had dawned on us that even though people make bad choices, one can never take away one vital factor — that every person is created in the image of God and therefore has some good qualities. Instead of focusing on the problems in people's lives, could that creation gift of God somehow become the controlling factor in our attitudes? Concentrating our attention rigidly on the gifts we think we may have brought to a situation, can become very inappropriate.

Reflecting more deeply on this staff study, a thought suddenly occurred to me. Quickly I put a notice in the local community newsletter calling for the tools to be returned for the benefit of the neighborhood — no questions asked.

Could it be, as the apostle Paul so beautifully puts it, that "the greatest of these", the gift of love, was now overriding my gift of organization that had gone awry?

Within a few days almost every tool was back in its place. In response to the newsletter note, a young man who was staying out of trouble, but still on probation, had persuaded the guilty ones to reconsider their actions. (by Hugo Neufeld)

I can identify with the feelings of anger after the tools had been stolen. If you've ever experienced injustice, or someone has hurt you, it's easy to let anger take control. We need to bring these feelings back to God in prayer. Like our passage says today, God is the one who will take care of those who wrong us. Our job is to keep caring for them. As we sense the peace of Christ at work in our hearts, we'll find the strength to work for peace with others. We live in a mixed up world. Sometimes it seems like there is chaos all around us. If we walk with Christ, we'll find that we have the peace that goes beyond human understanding. Before he was arrested and hung on the cross, Jesus told his disciples, "My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." John 14:27 Jesus knew his disciples would feel like everything is out of control and they may even lose hope. They would all be going through a really tough time, but in the end we see that God was still in control, as Jesus was raised to life. Let's pray.

Loving God, as we prepare to celebrate Christmas we remember how through Christ you've brought us peace. Thank-you for making a way for us to have peace with you through the cross. Thank-you for your love. It's hard to care for those who make us angry. And, it's hard to feel at peace when there are people dying of this pandemic, and there are people who are suffering because of environmental disasters, political disasters. People are suffering abuse,

broken relationships, and financial stress. Many are not at peace, because of health struggles. Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Grant us your peace. Grant us a peace that gives us the energy to work for peace in our relationships. Help us not to forget that even when things seem out of control, you are still at work, “behind the scenes.” May we be your agents of peace, through Christ our Lord, Amen.