

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.*

*But in the latter days, it will happen that the mountain of Yahweh's temple will be established on the top of the mountains, and it will be exalted above the hills; and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will go and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths." For the law will go out of Zion, and Yahweh's word from Jerusalem; and he will judge between many peoples, and will decide concerning strong nations afar off. They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war any more. But they will sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and no one will make them afraid: For the mouth of Yahweh of Armies has spoken. Indeed all the nations may walk in the name of their gods; but we will walk in the name of Yahweh our God forever and ever.*

I LOVE this time of year—well, I love the time of year that we are celebrating anyway. You know it is hard to get this Christmas in July thing in my head. It is clearly not December but we are singing Christmas carols and we have decorated—and yet it is going to be in the mid-80's today and instead of snow—it looks like we may have strong thunderstorms in a couple of days.

Anyway, I love Christmas—whether it is celebrated in July or in December. I love the songs and the sentiments. Mostly I love the fact that in the season of Christmas, we look into the eyes of God and find that there is enough love there for him to literally come here and live our lives and experience our experiences—and then give his life so that we might live eternally in his presence.

In reality, that is what we are about. That is why we celebrate Christmas—in reality, that is why we meet to worship every Sunday.

The first passage I read this morning is a classic Christmas passage—prophecy about the coming Messiah—the Prince of Peace. The second passage tells us what his reign will look like and feel like.

I'm so glad to be a part of this church and have the privilege to explore new ideas as we seek to serve God here—his church in this place and time. The concerts and the cruise-ins are great, but I am especially excited that you also choose to explore new ways to worship and reach others for the Kingdom of God.

One of the most awesome things I get to do is stand and speak, in a sense, for God as I read the scriptures and as I try to "...rightly divide the Word of Truth..." When I say "awesome" I mean that it is both exciting and scary at the same time.

If I propose to speak for God, then I want to be sure that I really am speaking for him. I can tell you that, through the years, I have heard a lot of people say things in his name that I'm pretty sure that God didn't and wouldn't say.

Some time back, there were billboards all around the country with short quotes and they were signed "God." They said things like, "don't worry be happy," and "don't make me come down there," and "we need to talk," and others.

Sometimes I get emails and see face-book posts that are shared over and over—with things on them that God would say or would think or something like that.

A lot of those were pretty good-but some were pretty questionable. When I was looking at those, I thought it would make more sense to choose short passages of scripture to put on the billboards or in those emails or on face-book so that you could be pretty sure that there were things God would say—because he already did.

Today's message is on peace—but not peace talks or peace accords or even world peace—though all those things are important. The peace we are talking IS literal like those but it is also about "peace and goodwill" and "the peace that passes all understanding."

At Christmas time we talk about peace and goodwill but sometimes it seems that we don't know what it is, that we don't love it, or that we don't know where to find it—especially in the middle of the shopping and parties and going that we do from Thanksgiving on—or maybe from Halloween on. It amazes me that so many don't know how to find peace and goodwill.

Sometimes we get caught up in thinking that peace and happiness and joy come from things. Houses. Cars. Motorcycles. Toys of all kinds. If we are not careful, we will try to substitute temporary joy or elation for peace and joy and happiness. Changing relationships over and over. Abusing substances. Seeking peace and joy in the wrong places.

As we seek to find peace this morning, I don't want to talk about what Tommy says about peace or what billboard says about peace, or what face-book says about peace, or what an email says about peace—but what God tells us about peace. Jesus had plenty to say about peace when he was there on earth and we find some of what he said in John 16 and 17. In our quest for peace, we do well to look at his words.

Instead of a billboard, we can go to the Bible.

*John 16:33: I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have oppression; but cheer up! I have overcome the world.*

Here we have Jesus addressing his disciples and telling them about peace and how to get peace. Good for them! If you look at their lives and their ministry and even at their deaths, you will see that it really worked. They really did have peace in the face of adversity—in the face of the Roman persecution.

So, good for them! But not just for them, because in the prayer that follows, we see that Jesus was not only talking to them and about them—not just thinking about these followers but about you and me also—about his followers to come.

*John 17:12-23 Those whom you have given me I have kept. None of them is lost, except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I come to you, and I say these things in the world, that they may have my joy made full in themselves. 14 I have given them your word. The world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I pray not that you would take them from the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in your truth. Your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, even so I have sent them into the world. 19 For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. 20 Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me. 22 The glory which you have given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, even as we are one; 23 I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that you sent me, and loved them, even as you loved me.*

Right there in the middle of that prayer (verse 20) we see that Jesus was praying for them—but for each of us. This life-lesson on peace was for them, but also for you and me.

So back to the original verse, “these things I tell you so that you might have peace...” What is Jesus talking about? I've pulled out a few verses in his passage on peace so that we might hear from Jesus how to have it and keep it.

*John 16:23 In that day you will ask me no questions. Most certainly I tell you, whatever you may ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.*

The first point in his peace lesson is that we have a father in heaven who listens to us. You and I have, through the birth of Christ—his work—the right to address the father—the creator of all and petition him with our needs and our wants. When we pray, he will listen and grant his presence and his spirit—granting those requests that fit in with his will for us and for others. When we pray, as children of God—our prayers NEVER get stuck in the attic or tangled in the ceiling fan. They are ALWAYS heard. We don't have to burn incense or use King James language—all we have to do is come humbly before God and he will be there and he will listen. THAT brings peace to my heart!

*John 16:13 However when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak from himself; but whatever he hears, he will speak. He will declare to you things that are coming.*

Jesus told his followers that he was going to prepare a place—but also that he was sending a guide—a comforter. One who would be cheerleader and advice giver and guide and teacher—much as Jesus had been those things for them. There is peace in the receiving of the Holy Spirit. There is peace in knowing that God is guiding if we will just listen.

In a spiritual sense, the Holy Spirit also comes alongside us and, spiritually speaking, gives our spirits a spiritual hug—as a VIP in God's world.

*John 17:2 even as you gave him authority over all flesh, so he will give eternal life to all whom you have given him.*

There is peace and comfort and goodwill in eternal life. There is peace and comfort to answering the question, “is this all there is?” through scripture—and finding that the answer is “no, there is not just more—there is MUCH more...” As God's children, we should not be living our lives in the eternal future instead of the present—that is a grave mistake. I'm just saying that there is peace in knowing that there is more and better “someday.”

*John 17:9 I pray for them. I don't pray for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.*

Let me give a different angle on this one, though it is similar. Here we have a Lord and Savior who is in the presence of the Creator and who is constantly interceding your you and me. How about that! That brings me peace. The one and only Son of God is sitting on a throne, making sure that God hears and listens and that God sees and hears us in the very best light. Jesus is using the power and the wisdom and ability of God to help you and me in our journey.

*John 17:17 Sanctify them in your truth. Your word is truth.*

Here we have two things that bring peace. Jesus working to make us holy and perfect—to sanctify us—not just in the future but also in the here and now. He is working to sanctify his brothers and sisters—through the Holy Spirit, through his prayers, and through the Word of Truth—the holy Bible. For those listening at that time, it was his teachings that brought them the truth. For us it is scripture.

There is peace to be found in the Bible. If we read and seek its truths, it will work in our hearts and minds to make us more and better and more holy and less frail.

Jesus has prayed for us to have peace.

He has told us that the Father in heaven listens to us—HEARS us and responds.

He has sent the holy Spirit.

He has answered the question, “is this all there is?” with a resounding “NO!”

Jesus is present with the Father, interceding for you and me.

God's word works in our hearts and minds and spirits to make us more whole and more holy.

I don't know about you but those things bring me peace!