

On Peace – mini sermon for 1Sept2020  
Gal5:22; John14:23,25-27

Peace and quiet.

Peace and harmony.

A peaceful, easy feeling.

All we are saying is give peace a chance.

A bumper sticker says: Visualize whirled peas.

War and peace.

No justice, no peace (as we've chanted at recent rallies).

As we're here in the memorial garden: rest in peace.

We continue our fruit of the Spirit theme from Galatians 5: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." It's to look for this fruit in our lives, in bearing what the world needs and what we need through these days. Pastor Sonja gave us love and joy last week. So we're up to peace.

We could first ponder what sort of peace this means. Peace as a synonym of calm or tranquil? Like if the wind dies down. Peace when tensions die down? Except we're often told that peace isn't just the absence of conflict—not just when the President leaves Kenosha. There is, then, a larger peace. Sonja preached in shared worship on Sunday about God's shalom—salaam in Arabic—which is the larger peace, the complete wellbeing across creation.

This biggest peace is clearly more than we can manage. We can't fix our world right now. We can hardly control our small corners, with the unknowns of each day and trying to figure it all out and make it through. We may want to make the world a better place, and may feel like in our own little ways we are able to do that. But we can't take care of healing the globe, can't singlehandedly stop the pandemic, can't make life right for our young people, can't fix a broken economy, can't end racism. I'm not quibbling about what that means for us trying; I'm just saying it's larger than us if peace is God's shalom and salaam and wholeness, perfection, bringing everything to its goal and completion.

But in that ultimate end of peace, we also have the very good reminder that this is God's work.

So, too, the fruit of the Spirit isn't because you're incredibly active or resilient or dedicated or have a certain feeling of peace, but because God is working it in the world and in you yourself. God is striving for peace, in big ways and in little fruits.

I think next, then, of peace vs. war. I've said peace is part of what appealed to me when I was young about the Christian faith, and about Jesus. To be peacemakers. Not to return evil for evil. To love our enemies and find nonviolent responses. It was the fruit of the Spirit that such faith of peace and pacifism grabbed me, in this God who doesn't act with violent vengeance, who rather than destroying or smiting seeks creative possibility and reconciliation. God likes peace, and works not war but peace.

At home this week, we've been watching "A Hidden Life," by Terrence Mallick. He's probably my favorite filmmaker, with such beautiful and introspective movies. They're often, indeed, peaceful—for their serene pace and views of the natural setting.

This one is less peaceful, because it's about an Austrian farmer named Franz Jägerstätter whose faith led him to be convinced it was against God and was wrong to serve as a Nazi soldier, even as his neighbors told him it was self-defense. Franz was, of course, arrested and punished. It's hard enough I've had to watch the movie in short pieces.

Peace isn't always peaceful. The work of peace isn't necessarily serene. In the striving for God's larger peaceful purpose, Franz's small fruit of conscientious objection wasn't easy.

I'm not sure I could do it. I'm not sure I'd personally be so strong or willing to sacrifice or committed to counter and resist. But maybe I don't have to think that way about what I'd do; maybe Franz is a clear example of the fruit of the Spirit.

That goes with making it through these days, the sacrifice and strength that we're all striving for and called to embody. To adapt to new roles and be trying hard to help our society and to live in our families. Sure, it's smaller stuff than global shalom. It's not even being tortured by Nazis. But

you still may not feel that resilient or willing or prepared to put in effort right now. That may leave you without a peaceful easy feeling.

But the Spirit is bearing fruit in you so you can find some confidence, so you can know it will be okay in God's wholeness and wellness. Peace isn't really about you doing anything perfectly and isn't about you navigating a pandemic unscathed and isn't about feeling comfortable.

In your discomfort you may still know peace through the Spirit, and in your imperfection you may recognize peace from the Spirit, and through any harm and hardship peace will still find and hold you through the Spirit.

At the end of a day and at a more final end, I trust you will rest in peace, because even when you can do no more, you are part of God's larger peace, shalom, salaam, whose fruit is for you and all creation. Peace be with you.

Jesus said, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

"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."