

Sunday, December 6, 2020
Aldersgate UMC Of Butte, MT
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Pastor Matthias (Matt) Krier

Scripture Lesson: Mark 1:1-8

Matthias Krier

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,

who will prepare your way;

the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

"Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight" ',

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God! Amen**

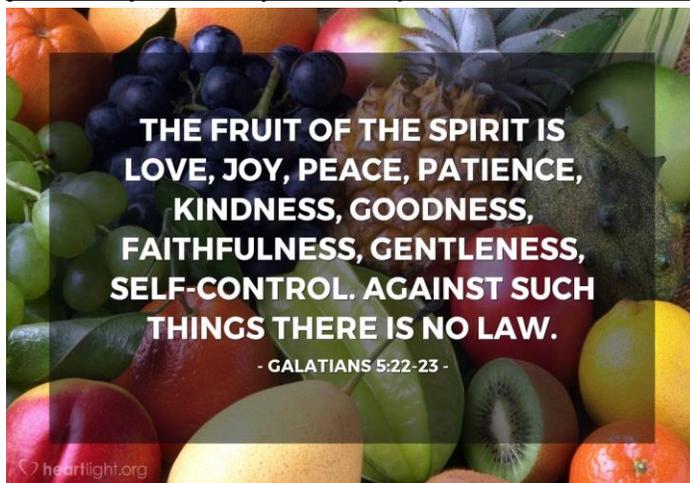
Message *Peace & Harmony (notes to message)*

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There is a verse I have used countless times over the years and even more so during this time of social and political turmoil at this time. Just saying the verse to myself over and over brings me to a place of peace sorely needed when there is so much in our world that is unsettling if not deeply troubling. This verse comes from the King James Version that I learned back in college where Jesus is being quoted in John 14:27:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

We are given a peace that is not from this world. It is a peace that surpasses all understanding no matter the circumstances of our lives. As you may already know, peace is also a fruit of the Spirit:



In fact, three of the themes we celebrate during Advent are fruits of the Spirit: peace, joy and love.

Now we can talk about these intellectually or we can talk about these spiritually. **Which would you prefer? Spiritually?** That is what I thought. There is no doubt we know the concepts of peace, joy and love, but do we actually know them? Today, we focus on knowing peace and how do we do that?



This may help.

John the Baptist is proclaiming that the Prince of Peace is coming and that this Yeshua will not only bring the peace that surpasses all understanding, Jesus will baptize believers in the Holy Spirit to make it so!

As the Mid-Week Reflection group met this week, we were struck with this paraphrase from the Message by Eugene Peterson:

*I am baptizing you here in the river,
turning your old life in for a kingdom life.
His baptism--a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit –
will change you from the inside out.*

The Message Bible

Did you hear this: *“Turning your old life in for a kingdom life.”* You may remember that Jesus taught that the kingdom of God was more like a “kin-dom” of God. Yeshua was not ushering in an empire which was widely known in Jesus’ time. Yeshua was proclaiming something very different. You wouldn’t know that by the way certain religious leaders and political leaders are speaking throughout our nation about the nature of the kingdom of God, would you? While we may experience the kin-dom of God here on earth, it is not an earthly kingdom.

The verse continues with: *“His baptism -- a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit -
- will change you from the inside out.”*

How can one not get all excited about being changed from the inside out.

Paul talks about it this way in II Corinthians 5:17



The world does not get this kind of peace that no matter the circumstances of life, we can still know peace. We can still know peace in the midst of pain and suffering.

How in the world is this possible? That's right, by the grace of God.

All we have to do is ask. Humble ourselves before God and ask.

How many of you are familiar with breath prayers? A breath prayer is a very short prayer generally 9 syllables or fewer so one can say it in one full breath: one inhalation and one exhalation.

For over two decades I have been praying this breath prayer. "Oh God, fill me with peace and joy." I have shortened to simply breathing in "peace" and exhaling "joy". Do that with me. Breathe in peace ... now exhale joy. This is an amazing way to experience the grace of God through mindful breathing.

Whenever I am waiting in line for something whether it be a green light; at the grocery store; at the post office; at the doctor's office and especially at the dentist's office, I pray, "Oh God, fill me with peace and joy!"

Something mystical happens when I pray while waiting which by the way, I don't mind waiting in line anymore. It gives me more time to actually use this spiritual practice of praying my breath prayer. If you don't have one, borrow this one. Breathe in peace and now exhale joy.

As helpful as this all is in learning to experience PEACE, this isn't possible except for one more thing some may take for granted. And just what is this one more thing that can bring peace to every heart who asks? I am not sure what it is for you, but I know what it is for me. It stems from this ONE WORD:



Pause with me for just a moment to ponder this one word, TRUST.

Unless we can TRUST as it says in Proverbs 3:5,6, I do not believe I could experience this peace that surpasses all understanding. This isn't to say that there aren't a number of spiritual practices that can help experience this peace, because there are. But at the very foundation of experiencing this deep and abiding peace, through the Prince of Peace, is TRUST.

Due to everything that is happening in our world right now with COVID; shortage of hospital staff as well as beds around the country; folks still not taking this disease seriously; along with the devastating effects economically and personally from this pandemic not to mention all the issues around the transition in Washington, we have much to pray about in the way of bringing peace not only to ourselves, but to those around us.

Thus, I invite you to meditate on this verse for just a moment.

I believe with all my heart that we can find this deep peace in learning to trust more deeply that this too shall pass:



I shall close with this beautiful song from Julian of Norwich who lived in the 1300's. Julian clearly knew pain and suffering through disease herself when half of the city of Norwich died due what was called "Black Death". The Black Death pandemic killed between 75 million to 200 million people at the time. Julian suffered greatly throughout her 74 years of life and due to this suffering wrote this song.

In these troubling times, I hope and I trust that this song will be helpful as we face uncertain times ahead. Let us prepare for the Sacrament of Holy Communion through this song entitled "All Shall Be Well":

Hymn of Preparation

All Shall Be Well (4 ½ minute video)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Kadbd3tCqc