

"THE PEACE THAT CHRIST GIVES"

A Sermon By

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Park Avenue United Methodist Church
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INTRODUCTION

A couple was traveling out West. They stopped to admire the view at a place called "Echo Point". "Try it" suggested the wife. "Aw, I think it's silly" replied her husband but after a few minutes he got up his nerve and shouted at the top of his voice, "Baloney". After a brief moment, he said, "See...nothing happened."

"Try it again" said his wife. So this time he shouted, "Hey, I'm the best looking man in the world". Back came the echo, "Baloney!" "Baloney!"

Is there anyone here this morning who is absolutely satisfied with everything he is, with everything she has? I read somewhere recently that only one-third of men and one-half of women rate themselves as being happy and content. I wonder...did you make the cut? The truth is that many of us find ourselves bogged down in the mire of discontent and unfortunately life has a way of "echoing" back what we say to it.

DEVELOPMENT

The philosopher Schopenhauer once compared us to a Bull Ant. He pointed out that if you cut a Bulldog Ant in half, the front and the rear segments will enter into a savage fight. The head will seize the tail with its teeth, while the tail will sting the head with fury. The fight, he said, might last for hours.

Now, that's the way that some of us are on the inside. There is a part of us that wants to move ahead and there's a part of us that wants to stand absolutely still. There is a part of us that wants success and recognition. There is also a part of us that wants to sit on the river bank and while away the hours. Yes, there's a part of us that wants to serve Christ, but there is another part of us that says,

"Look, I've done my bit... I've got enough to do right now...let someone else have a turn...I'm not really up for it...I'm not needed."

There's a civil war going on inside many of us. Few of us know what it is to live lives of contentment and peace. Jesus said to His disciples,

"I'm leaving you with a gift - peace of mind and heart!
And the peace I give isn't fragile like the peace the world gives. So, don't be troubled. Don't be afraid!"

What a promise and what a gift! Peace of mind and heart. I believe He can give it to us. You ask, how do you sign up for it. Where do you sign up? Let me suggest some ways to travel in order to get His peace...that peace "that passes.."

A HEALTHY SENSE OF WHO WE ARE

First-off, Christ gives every one of us a healthy sense of who we are. This is a good place to begin. Call it self-esteem.

I've always enjoyed that story about Oliver Wendell Holmes walking down a Cambridge, Massachusetts street one day and a little girl joined him in his walk. When the girl started to turn back home, the famed jurist said to her,

"When your mother asks you where you've been, tell her you've been out walking with Oliver Wendell Holmes."

She replied with childlike confidence,

"And when your folks ask you where you've been, tell them that you were out walking with Mary Susan Brown".

That little girl had a pretty healthy sense of who she is!

Psychologists tell us that a healthy sense of identity is one of the most valuable gifts we can give our children. Who was it who said, "No One can make you feel inferior without your own consent". Eleanor Roosevelt? First, we need that gift of identity ourselves. Self-identity. Self-esteem. And if we did not receive it from our parents, we will need to look to God.

Larry Bird, in the story of his life, tells of an incident that he still remembers. As he now comes into the twilight of his career as a Celtic basketball star, he still remembers what it was like to be slighted and overlooked and unappreciated.

He writes about being chosen in his Senior year of High School for the Kentucky - Indiana All Star games. These are a big deal out in Indiana and Kentucky as some of you know. He was chosen to play on the second team and in the practice games, the second team, the second unit, outplayed the first. And in the first All Star game in Louisville the Indiana team was up by eight points or so in the second half when the Coach put in the second unit, the one that included Larry Bird. They blew Kentucky off the floor. Quickly, they added 20 points.

The same thing happened some time later in Indianapolis. The Indiana team was trailing in the first half but when Larry Bird's unit went in, they went crazy and took complete control of the game. The Indiana coach started the second half of the game with the first unit and then again switched to the second unit, only this time Bird didn't get to go in and he just sat there on the bench wondering why he wasn't in the game.

With about two minutes left in the game, the coach came over to where Bird was sitting on the bench and said,

"Hey, Larry...I forgot all about you. Why don't you go in now and get some points...."

Larry Bird turned to his coach and said,

"Too late, Coach....I've already been embarrassed."

The Coach got pretty angry at his response but Larry Bird had been humiliated. He had put in his time just like everyone else. Everybody else had gotten to play. If the coach had told him he wasn't good enough, that would have been one thing. But to come and say he had forgotten him was another. How can a coach forget about somebody, asks Larry Bird, after he's been practicing with him for two or three weeks...as an All Star.

Larry Bird went on to say this,

"I know I reacted wrong, but I was young. However, if I had to do it all over again....I would probably do the same thing because I know how embarrassed I felt that night. My values have changed. My outlook has changed, but I can still remember how I felt that night...just sitting there...devastated...totally forgotten."

If one of the all time greats who has ever played the game of basketball can feel forgotten, how about the rest of us who are not as skilled as he. Let's face it...it hurts when we are overlooked, unappreciated, forgotten.

Remember this, however, that God does not forget us. He tells us we are somebody. Let that echo through your mind. Those early disciples faced all matters of opposition and even persecution, but they knew they were not forgotten. You see Christ had given them a new identity. He had given them an inner peace that the world could not touch or take away. Christ has a way of giving each of us a pretty healthy sense of who we are. That's the first point to pin down.

THE JOY OF A GREAT PURPOSE

Then, too, He also gives us the joy of a great purpose. That's what He did for those disciples. He sent them out into the world to make disciples of all humanity, a purpose big enough for anybody. What's the grand purpose of your life? Do you have one?

Alvin Toffler, that highly esteemed futurist, is reported to have said something that I resonate to.

"You've got to think about 'big things' while you're doing small things...so that all the small things go in the right direction."

And it's true, isn't it? If we are to be effective and happy and successful, we need to be driven by something bigger than ourselves. For Benno Schmidt there's something "bigger" out there than running Yale University...the entire future of education in this country weighs heavily on his heart.

Companies now-a-days are encouraged to write out their mission. What is their purpose for "being"? And whom are they seeking to serve? I think it would be helpful if we all could sit down and write out our own personal "mission statement". What great purpose drives our lives.

What are some of our purposes? How about something like this,

"To live all my days making my life pleasing to God"

Or how about something like this...try this on for size:

"To enrich some one else's life...someone who cannot do anything for me in return...."

Or,

"To use my gifts, abilities and opportunities to the utmost. To make a significant contribution to the world in which I live."

We all have something we can do to make the world...to make this city a better place! Have you ever stopped to think about what happens to this city when, for instance, the sanitation workers go out on strike...or the transit workers. Disaster! I think we tend to take such persons pretty much for granted...but the contribution of such people to the public good is immense. The real issue, I think, in life is not our abilities or our opportunities. The issue is commitment to a purpose. To something that will leave the world a better place for our being here.

They say that a schoolmaster in France was very discouraged with one of his students. This is what he wrote in his rollbook regarding this student,

"He is the smallest, the meekest and the most unpromising boy in my class. I am very doubtful about his future!"

But you know, half a century later, an election was held in France to select the greatest Frenchman. By popular vote, that "smallest, meekest and most unpromising boy in the class" was chosen. Louis Pasteur was his name - the founder of modern medicine. At the age of 73, a national holiday was declared in his honor. He was too old and too weak to attend the ceremony in his honor and so he sent a message to be read by his son and this is what he wrote,

"The future belongs not to the conquerors, but to the saviors of the world."

Louis Pasteur was "driven" by a great purpose. Your name. My name...may never be household words like Pasteur's, but we, too, can be driven by a great purpose. Never forget that. And Christ can give us that purpose. But there is one more thing that Christ gives us and let me speak to that as well.

THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Christ gives us the presence of the Holy Spirit. Next Sunday the Church pauses to celebrate Pentecost, the day the followers of Christ came together and received the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Some will tell you that all you have to do is believe in yourself and you can have it all. There are others who will say that you can move mountains if you are driven by a great purpose. Both are partially right, but a healthy sense of identity and a driving purpose are not enough in themselves. One thing more is needed if we're going to go all the way and that is the "in-dwelling spirit" of the Living God.

Think of it this way. An Air Canada flight ran into trouble one Monday morning not too long ago. The passengers were enjoying a movie on a Boeing 767 when the jumbo jet's massive engines abruptly stopped. Those without earphones were the first ones to notice something was wrong. Then came a break in the movie and the pilot announced that Flight 143 would be making an emergency landing. Sixty-nine people were trapped in an agonizingly slow but inescapable descent to earth.

For several minutes, a desperate silence hung over the cabin. Then fear gave way to screams as the landing neared. All the latest technology could not keep the jumbo jet in the air another second. What had happened was this.

The electronic digital fuel gauge was out of order. The flight crew depended on figures given by the refueling crew before takeoff. But someone on the refueling crew had confused pounds for kilograms. And thus, 800 miles short of its destination, this jet had run out of fuel. Fortunately, the captain and co-captain were able to glide Flight 143 some 100 miles to a former military air field and there a dramatic crash landing heavily damaged the jet's landing gear, but - by the grace of God - no one on board was hurt.

An impressive craft. Headed in the right direction. But running out of fuel. It happens to people, too. They have a high sense of self-esteem. And yes, they are motivated by a sense of purpose. But one day they wake up somewhat disillusioned and dishearted. The fuel has all been spent!

You and I know where ultimately "that fuel" comes from for life's long haul. It comes from God's "in-dwelling Spirit". This was the most important gift that God, the Father, bestowed upon those first disciples of Jesus. And this is the most important gift He can bestow upon us. He gives it to all who ask. And as we receive it, we come to know His peace in our hearts and His power in lives. I believe it and in our better moments, I think we all believe it!

PRAYER

We feel that quiet "tug" in our hearts in these moments, O God. Wrestle with each of us in the deep corners of our lives. Make us Your own. Give us that measure of inner peace and quietness that can make a difference in our lives. Truly, it does pass all of our human understanding. In the name of Christ, we now pray. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: May 31, 1992

O THOU who art the SOURCE of all things good, grant that we who are so often inclined to remember what we LACK may not forget what we have! What we have been given... that with which we are blessed!

WE BLESS THEE for the warming quality of Spring: for green grass, budding trees and longer days; for parks and paths and bicycles, and for all the scents and colors that edge us each day toward the days of Summer...

AND WE THANK THEE for the interflow of ideas, for the sharing of convictions, for man's ability to receive and to infuse hope, and the lifting play of Divine Truth on the human spirit.

OUR HIGHEST PRAISE we reserve for YOU - our God - whose mercy is the same from age to age, and whose life-giving grace has been declared and revealed to us in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

CENTER OUR far-ranging lives in YOUR eternal love, O God, that in whatever time or circumstance in this city we may know and feel and celebrate Your PRESENCE, Your POWER, and YOUR PEACE.

TO LOOK at us as we sit here this morning, Lord, it would appear that our grip on life is firm and that we're managing things quite well, that we have come to terms with our fears, our failures, our frustrations....

AND YET, in our eyes as in Your sight, we are not the masters of our fate that we so often pretend to be.

LORD, we are anxious, deeply anxious about the well-being of our loved ones - children, parents and grandparents. Our jobs, our wives, our husbands, our health. We worry, too, about...

THE NUMBER and the power of our sins and the tug of those temptations with which we constantly wrestle behind closed doors.

AND SO IN THIS HOUR OF PRAYER THIS MORNING, show us each once again the connection between our anxious, restless minds and our lack of faith in YOU.

MAKE REAL in us the glorious, risen life that Jesus brought, lest the cares of either self or society rob us of the joy of life.

AND ANXIOUS though we be about the long view, help us to take without fear the short step immediately before us, knowing that of such the story of life is so often written. All this we now dare to pray in the name and spirit of Christ.

"And all things...whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing...you shall receive. And as many as touched Him were made whole!"

"Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage and He shall strengthen thine heart. For we dwell in the shelter of the Almighty. He is our refuge and our strength."

"We know that in everything, God works together for good with those who love Him!"

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint".

"God so love the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases".

"Thou wilt keep Him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in thee".

"In the name of Jesus Christ, I share with you the Good News: We are forgiven".

PRAYERS / LORD'S PRAYER

O Thou, who hearest prayer, hear our prayers...for others, as well as for ourselves. Touch with healing, O God...Father of us all, those whom we mention in our prayers this hour:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

...beloved members and friends of this congregation. Comfort the bereaved and the broken hearted among us...and especially be close to _____ who in recent days has lost a loved one. Abide among us as a healing benediction. Heal each of us at the point of our deepest need.

Answer the upspoken prayers now offered to thee on the altars of our hearts, spoken in the name and spirit of Jesus, who taught us to say when we pray. For we ask all of this in the powerful name and lifting spirit of Jesus who taught us to say when we pray...

"Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power and the glory, forever. Amen"

FIRST INTRODUCTION

The week of toil has ended. Our day of rest is at hand. May the rest and the quiet of this hour of worship refresh our inner life. And may it renew in all of us a sense of God's holy and abiding Presence.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

SECOND INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter now into a time of silent meditation....a time in which we prepare ourselves expectantly...that the Spirit of the living God may be made real to us in this hour of worship.

In quietness, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

THIRD INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter into a time of silent meditation as we come into the Presence of Him whom our faith declares to be the Source of all life and love, all peace and power, the Source of all hope and healing.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

FOURTH INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter now into a time of silent meditation. In these moments, let us ponder the pattern our lives have been weaving as we come into the Presence of Him whom our Faith declares to be the Source of all life and love, all peace and power, the Source of all hope and healing.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

MEDITATION

We rest our hearts in the Promise of Jesus who said:

"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light".

"Ask, and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock, and it will be open unto you."

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father, but by Me. If you love Me, you will keep my commandments"

"For I tell you...do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat...or drink..nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food? And the body more than raiment."

"But seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present...to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature - shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, Our Lord."

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, May 31, 1992

I. GREETING / VISITORS

- A. A word of welcome to the visitors who have joined us.... We hope that we shall have opportunity....be free in the sharing of your name. Fill out...sign a guest book. Come, worship with us....and come, work with us in the outreach concerns of our church.
- B. We like to say that we've been doing the "Lord's work" at this busy corner of His Kingdom since 1837...fourth building... roots are deep in the soil....we minister in the name of Christ and it is in His loving spirit....both members and friends. Members: be sure to put your name tag on and make a point of reaching out to one or two new people....

II. PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Parish concerns are listed for you in the bulletin. Review those concerns on your own in these moments...noting the two meetings scheduled for this week: PPR Committee this evening. Trustees tomorrow evening.
- B. A few tickets are still available for tomorrow evening's Methodist Night out at Shea Stadium. A chance to see the Mets play...and to make a contribution to the Methodist City Society. ALSO: be sure to sign up for a summer punch hour...else...
- C. Today is the last Sunday to make a gift for the Golden Cross appeal. A few more gifts today should put us up and over the top....health care agencies of our Conference. Thank you for the gifts received.
- D. We are coming to the quieter months of June, July and August, but there is still a lot going on. Confirmation for our seven young people will take place next Sunday. It will be a special day in their lives and we hope you will want to be here to help celebrate this milestone in their lives.
- E. Tickets to the All Church Picnic of late June will soon go on sale. More information on this next Sunday as we go into June.

III. OFFERING

- A. Jesus said,

"It is more blessed to give than to receive!" In this spirit, let us worship God...

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