

PEACE



# Sunday, December 6, 2015

Psalm 91; John 14

All of us can look back over the last year and recall significant “high” moments. One of those for our family was the wedding of our oldest son. I was honored to be able to perform the ceremony for him and his wonderful new wife; and I can proudly say that I did so nearly tear-free (I did shed one or two...). We are blessed to welcome her, and Shelly is thrilled to finally have another female in our family (and with three boys, perhaps we will have two more daughters-in-love one of these days!). They are a great couple with a bright future ahead as they love each other and seek Jesus in their life and relationship.

One of the meaningful parts of the ceremony was something I hadn't seen before in all of my years of officiating: instead of the usual “unity candle,” the two of them planted a single plant into a clay pot, together pouring dirt in over the roots. Wherever they live, this plant will serve as a reminder of the growth and unity of their relationship. Perhaps one day it will be big enough for our future grandchildren to find shade under. This symbol calls to mind another image: the peace that we find when we rest under and in God.

Read Psalm 91; it describes the strong peace we find as we rest under God's powerful protection. Verse one says, “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” (niv) Because of Jesus (John 14:27), we can be at peace in the shade of God's loving presence in our lives.

Pastor Mike

# Monday, December 7, 2015

I look forward to Christmas every year, primarily for the gathering of family together. The Christmas of 1998 was the first Christmas that truly intermixed joy with sorrow for me. My grandfather had passed away just before Thanksgiving, leaving a gaping hole in our family. While we mourned, we still looked forward to gathering together as a family with my grandma. Our plans were shattered when just days before Christmas my beloved grandmother suffered a stroke, and then another.

Christmas Eve 1998 our family gathered, but this time we gathered in a hospital room, brokenhearted. I don't recall how it happened or whose idea it was, but with our hearts aching, my brother, my cousins and I decided to turn our sorrow towards something productive. That night in Memorial Hospital, we traveled from room to room singing Christmas carols to patients. In this process, even in the midst of one of the darkest nights we had shared together as a family, there was a sense of peace that washed over us.

John 14:27 says,

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.

I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

God's peace doesn't make sense in the midst of our sorrow and circumstances. That's the whole point of it. It's a peace that overcomes the world. It's a peace that transcends all understanding.

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,  
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:7

Grandma made it through that Christmas, and one more after that. This coming Christmas, like all the others before it, our family will gather and remember the Prince of Peace foretold in Isaiah 9:6. And we will remember grandma and grandpa and be thankful that we will reunite with them one day in heaven, all because of that baby in a manger, our Prince of Peace.

Eva Lounsbury

# Tuesday, December 8, 2015

My grandfather passed away about twenty years ago. Several years prior to this, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease and Alzheimer's Dementia. As I watched his health decline with increased shaking and hallucinations, I became fearful and uncertain where this disease would take him. I had never been close to someone with symptoms like these. The hallucinations would make grandpa scared and fearful, and he worried about his family being in danger.

I watched as others tried to convince him the events he saw weren't real. He told me one day that nobody believed him and they all thought he was crazy. I became very frustrated at how very unfair this illness was, and how it was affecting all of us. After all, he was the perfect grandpa! He was a big man with a big heart and a gentle spirit who never lost his temper; at least this grandson never saw it. I thought he deserved to be healed and have this burden lifted from him but it was evident that his healing was going to come another way.

I began to pray that God would show me how to deal with grandpa. Over time God gave me an incredible peace with the situation and showed me that my grandpa was still the same wonderful, Christ-like man he had always been, except his thought processes were different now. God showed me how to converse with grandpa during his hallucinations in such a way that didn't belittle him or make him wonder if he was crazy. As God granted me peace, the time I had left with my grandpa was wonderful. The same peace is available to all of us in every difficulty we face. Seek His peace today!

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:4-9)

Dean Bass

# Wednesday, December 9, 2015

“...In Me, you may have peace.” John 16:33

My Father was a very troubled man. Growing up with an angry and abusive mother, Dad ran away from home as a young teen. He worked as a crew hand on the river boats that plied the Mississippi during the 1920's. He learned to be rough and tough and took up all the vices rough, tough men were expected to have. And he had no peace.

As a husband and father, Dad struggled with the addictive effects of alcohol and nicotine. He was often unfaithful to my mother. Our occasional good times were always blotted out by his incessant bouts of anger, depression, resentment, and abuse. We had no earthly peace.

He finally left us when I was sixteen years old. During the next six years we were to meet only once and correspond only two times. I remained fearful of him. I learned from relatives that he was his old self. He still had no peace.

At the end of those six years a miracle happened to me – the birth of my first son. My Dad heard about it and called, quietly asking if he could come for a visit – he very much wanted to see his new grandson.

I found him a totally different person. Dad held my son and cried with joy - I'd never seen him cry before. He told me he had quit smoking and drinking. He no longer swore and cursed. He had apologized to my Mom and asked her forgiveness. He told me he loved me - words he had never spoken to me before.

He also said he'd returned to the Jesus of his childhood. I was astounded! I'd never heard him use the name Jesus except as a swear word. I also discovered that months earlier, when he'd heard he was going to be a grandfather; he'd promised God that he would always be a good example to his grandchild. And he always was.

So, the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of my son's forthcoming birth triggered in his memory the love he knew Jesus had always had for him. God had answered my prayers. Dad lived for only three more years – long enough to hear his grandson tell him “...I love you Granddad.” He had, in those short three years, the peace he had been searching for his entire life. God's peace.

“You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in You,  
all whose thoughts are fixed on You!”

Isaiah 26:3

Jim Cunningham

# Thursday, December 10, 2015

Luke 2:8-20

Throughout my life there has always been a fascination with snow. My memories as a kid were sitting in my house with the snow falling and the fireplace going, just taking in the winter season. Our home growing up had these large windows that overlooked the city of Marysville from up on the hill. I just loved how the snow would blanket everything with a beautiful white uniform look. When we were lucky enough to receive a good snowfall overnight I would sneak out of my room and head downstairs to the back porch. I would open the sliding glass window, stick my hand out to catch some snowflakes, and take in the crisp, cool winter air. The calmness in our neighborhood and the city was always something so amazing to take in. The untouched snow on the streets and the glistening of streetlights brought a tranquil beauty to a world that always seems to struggle with finding it.

When I think about the Nativity story I am sure it was far from peaceful when it came to the night Christ was born. A cave surrounded by barn animals, a mother giving birth, and a newborn son coming into the world just doesn't come across as peaceful in my mind. Yet, something changed that night in Bethlehem. Hearts were warmed, and a sense of peace came over God's people that could only come from the Savior. As the angels tell the shepherds of Christ being born I can only imagine how their hearts were filled with a calmness that could only come from God. Then to be reassured of His love as they encountered Christ in the manger that night. I am sure it was a moment in their lives where everything stopped and they truly found peace.

To this day, I still will open up the door and take in the snow, the crisp winter air, and the peace that comes with it. I love the feeling and how it takes me back to my days as a kid. It is those memories I go to, to seek peace in my devotion time with Him. I would encourage you to try and do the same. Find some moments today, search for a peaceful place, and allow Christ some time to bring tranquility into your life. It might be just the thing you need in this season of the year.

Pastor James Lounsberry

# Friday, December 11, 2015

If I look through my experiences, and examine the times I truly felt peace in my life, one particular instance comes straight to the forefront of my mind. It was my seventh grade year, at a time my family was struggling for money, trying to make ends meet month to month. This was something my parents tried to hide from my brother and me, but stress relating to money seemingly bled from their pores. It was no secret that we needed help financially, and it was an issue I was not shy in bringing to God's attention. One particular night, I was buried deep in a homework assignment, and up to my neck in an argument with God. I recall being angry, frustrated, and altogether stressed out about our current circumstances. Peace was certainly nowhere to be found.

It was in the midst of this temperamental mood that the doorbell rang; drawing me from my room to investigate. As I began to peek around the corner towards the door I found my parents picking up a blank, plain, white envelope. As they opened it, the contents were revealed. Inside this small package was a clump of money and a small slip of paper. Written on the paper was one thing - Matthew 6:25-34.

As I returned to my room, evidently less angry with God as I thanked Him for this amazing gift; I went to my Bible and read the verses. As the words began to sink into my brain, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace and security. It felt as if God was whispering in my ear directly, "I will take care of your needs and your family; you need only to follow Me."

It is in the midst of our everyday, crazy lives God truly works to give us this overwhelming sense of peace. In today's world we are so caught up in the idea that we have to be secure in a job, a relationship, money, a church – that we often forget that the only thing we need to be secure in is Jesus. God promises that He has a plan to prosper us; we must only seek His kingdom and trust Him. So this week, as we all wait for a feeling of PEACE to wash over us and fill our lives, let us not forget to seek Him first.

Kelsey Hedrick

# Saturday, December 12, 2015

“I’m leaving you at peace. I’m giving you my own peace.  
I’m not giving it to you as the world gives  
so don’t let your hearts be troubled, and don’t be afraid.”  
John 14:27

Peace came to me at a time when I needed it most. I was a young mother with four children under the age of six. I wasn’t working outside the home and my husband was working on my father’s small farm. We had very little money and few resources. We lived in a small house that was bursting at the seams. I was anxious, deeply depressed and I wondered how we were going to make it financially, and quite frankly physically and emotionally.

One day when I thought that I could no longer go on feeling this way any more, I fell down on my knees and cried out to God for help. He reminded me of His promise to rest in Him because He would take care of everything, I need only accept my circumstances and put my trust and hope in Him. A peace poured over me and filled me with hope. That hope changed me and I looked at things differently, thanking God for our family and house full of love. I learned that peace does not come from circumstances but from our Lord. I look back on those times now and I realize those days were some of the best of my life. Raising my children and working hard to make a good life for us has shaped me into who I am today. My children have come back to tell me that they are happy we didn’t have all the material things; they had to work hard to get what they wanted. They say that this has made them who they are today...capable, loving and responsible adults.

Peggy Urlacher

