

Problem: What peace does Christ leave with us?

-As a kid I had the reputation in my family as a “worry wort.” My worry mostly revolved around sometimes my Dad coming home from work late and my mom and I wondering where he was. It showed itself in my brother getting separated from us in a big convention center and my frantic searching for him. As I have entered adult life, I have worked a lot with my anxiety through meditation, exercise, and even therapy. Through all of this I have found that anxiety and worry are not new to my family either. Infact, my great grandfather was a successful banker in Minneapolis but being the first-born son, began in farming as he inherited the family farm. The farming process, we know from old letters and conversations with my grandmother, almost did him in. It wasn't the hard work that was tough for him, however, it was the unpredictability of the whole thing: waiting for rain or too much rain, bugs and/or pests descending upon the crops, figuring out the right time to harvest. My great grandfather worried so much that he got ulcers and was told by his doctor he might want to look for another profession. So, he handed over the family farm to his brother and went to school to study accounting and banking, a much more (arguably) predictable vocation.

-Maybe you don't struggle to the point of getting ulcers, but I am willing to bet that most of you, like me, have wrestled with anxiety and worry at one point. What if something doesn't work out? What if something bad happens to me or someone in my family? What if I am not able to figure something out?

-Anxiety can lurk in the shadows of our lives affecting us in ways we might not even realize.

-If you want to talk about being worried, Jesus' disciples are up to their heads in worry at this point of our gospel story. This section of the Gospel of John is known as the “Final Discourse”, or the final sermon of sorts that Jesus gives while around the table in the upper room before being arrested and killed. The disciples are scared and worried: they don't know what's going to happen.

-“Anxiety, grief, and troubled hearts are on Jesus' mind”-Geoffrey Hoare

- This is probably why Jesus gives them (and us) one of the most famous sayings from the New Testament: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” Peace. Peace.

-Peace, in my mind, can be an overused and cliché word that can mean many different things. So what kind of peace is Jesus talking about here?

Solution: Christ leaves us the peace of God's presence: knowing that we are loved, valued, never alone and whole.

-The Greek word for peace that Jesus uses here is *eirenen*. Biblical scholars are almost unanimous in seeing *eirenen* as a translation of the Hebrew word “shalom”, a common greeting in the Jewish community. This is the same greeting that forms the base of “Pax Christi” (Latin for “peace of Christ”) which made it's way into Christian worship.

-Many people mistake “Shalom” as the “absence of conflict” or “rest”. This is, certainly, part of what Shalom means but not entirely. One online dictionary literally translates the greeting of Shalom as: “may all your essential pieces be joined together.” In other words, *shalom* and its Greek translation *eirenen* mean peace through being made whole; a holistic sense of well-being.

-Many of you might feel a little *deja vu* from an earlier Sunday in Easter with this greeting because Jesus uses it again after the resurrection in chapter 20: 19 (which we read a couple of weeks ago) when he appears to the fearful disciples once again in the Upper Room after appearing to Mary. “Peace be with you.”

-It certainly seems to be Jesus’ go-to words in response to worry and anxiety: “Peace to you: may you be made whole.”

- There’s a documentary on climbing Mount Everest that is now about 10 years old from the Discovery Channel which documents a climbing team’s entire journey: from training, to acclimating to altitude, to eventually climbing the final peak. Tim Medvetz, a former Hells Angel who got into a terrible motorcycle accident that left him with many pins and rods in his back joined this climbing team. The documentary shows Tim interacting and becoming close with some of the *sherpas*, a term used to designate the mountain people who are native to the mountains around Everest and who are hired by climbing teams to help carry gear and lay out routes. Tim stubbornly refuses to use oxygen and becomes significantly fatigued in getting his 190 lb frame up the cliffs of the mountain. His lack of oxygen affects his mind and he becomes more and more stubborn and combative the higher he goes. Tim collapses about half a mile from the summit. He stubbornly and almost incoherently argues with the team leader that it is time to turn around. The team leader is almost forced to leave Tim for dead, but it’s the sherpa who finally physically lifts Tim up, takes him by the hand, and leads him down to safety. Tim later recounts how fearful he was. “It was as if my mind wasn’t doing what I was telling it to do. I was incredibly scared and felt it was getting hopeless. It was my sherpa friend who helped me get some of the pieces back together.”

-Sometimes in our fear we find ourselves falling apart and we can’t put things back together ourselves. Tim Medvetz was at this point and maybe we all can see a bit of ourselves in Tim’s situation (albeit less extreme).

-Jesus’ “shalom” points to a promise and a fact. It’s a fact that wherever God is present, the pieces, even against all odds, can come back together. It’s a promise in saying: God will be present with you (like the Sherpa was with Tim on Everest) in picking up the pieces of your fear and worry. God will be present to make you whole again.

Implication: Our job is to let God’s peace happen.

- The peace that Jesus gives is nothing less than the consequence of the presence of God. When God is present, peace is made manifest.” -Geoffrey Hoare

-That's the kind of peace, if you look at it from the world's perspective, that's a better kind of peace anyway. Peace isn't just the absence of conflict, it's the presence of wholeness. Martin Luther famously said: Jesus Christ came so that we as humanity could live out more fully who we were created to be.

-In living out more fully who we were created to be, we can live not in a piecemeal fashion that is gripped by our anxiety but by a knowledge that we are filled with God's presence.

-It is important to note, however: will fear come to us again sometimes? Will we probably fall into pieces again on the mountain like Tim? Yes, most likely we will. It would be cheap for me or the church to say: "just believe in Jesus and you won't be afraid." Because that will simply not be the case.

-So that's we say "the peace of Christ" is so important. That's why we need to repeat Jesus' words to each other every week. Because sometimes we are going to be fearful, worried, or anxious and are going to have some pieces missing. But you can be filled today with the power and presence of Jesus Christ. With God, anything is possible- even you being made whole once again.

-So I say to you: "Shalom- Peace be to you." May your fear and worry which may have you in pieces right now leave you and may you be made whole through the power and presence of Jesus Christ. Amen.