# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Fruit of the Spirit: Peace”**

**Colossians 3:15-17**

 **December 5, 2021**

A couple struggling in their marriage was meeting with a Christian marriage counselor. Toward the end of their time together he gave them a small wooden cross and asked them to place it in the room in their home where they fought the most that it might remind them of God’s desire that they live peacefully with each other. The wife looked at her husband, turned to the counselor, and said: “You’d better give us five more.”

Every one of us is attracted to the idea of peace. We want to experience peace within, we want to experience peace in our relationships with family and friends, and we pray for peace in the world. Yet, peace can be hard to come by. Talking about it and hoping for it is not the same as actually experiencing it.

We have been speaking this fall about the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, how he seeks to produce various kinds of fruit that reflect the character of God. Among those is the fruit of peace. And, it was Jesus who said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” So, not only are we to be at peace, but we to be agents of peace in the world. How does the Spirit bring about peace in our lives? I invite you to turn with me to Colossians 3:15-17

And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

How can we live in peace? By letting the peace that comes from Christ rule in our hearts. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed that the Messiah would be the Prince of Peace, and when Jesus was born the angels sang, “Peace on earth, goodwill to men.” To his disciples on the night before he was crucified, Jesus said: “My peace I give you. It is a gift the world cannot give.” We cannot bring about peace through our own efforts separate from Christ. Peace is not merely an ethical principle or moral motivation. It is the concrete work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who let Christ’s peace rule in their hearts.

The best way for us to understand Jesus’ way of bringing peace is to examine our relationship with God. Sin has separated us from God and there is nothing that we can do to bring ourselves and God together. When God created us he did so for the purpose of being in relationship with us. That is where Adam and Eve found themselves – in relationship with God. The Bible tells us that they walked with God in the garden. They enjoyed God’s company and he enjoyed theirs. But, their sin of disobedience created a divide between them and God, and your sin and my sin have brought about that same divide. As a result, in the strong language of the book of Romans, we have become enemies of God. And, the only one who can do anything about that is Jesus. He is the one who has made peace between us and God, who has saved us from being enemies of God so that we are now children of God, daughters and sons of our heavenly Father. How did he do that? By dying on a cross so that our sin may be forgiven, taking upon himself the consequence of sin that should have been ours to bear.

Christ’s way of making peace involved humility, sacrifice and a love for the enemies of his Father, including you and me. The Son of God, through whom all things were created, humbled himself and became human. Then, as a human, he suffered the shame and agony of the cross. And on that cross, looking upon those who had pounded the nails into his body, he said, “Father, forgive them." To allow the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts means that we, like Christ, must be willing to be humble, must be willing to put the needs of others ahead of our own, and must be willing to desire peace even with our enemies.

When God was in conflict with us because of our sin, he didn’t take us to task and condemn us. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” When we find ourselves in conflict with others, the peace of Christ will not allow us to condemn them, that is, to further separate ourselves from them. Rather, the peace of Christ seeks reconciliation by exercising the peace-making characteristics of Christ, such as humility, sacrifice, and love.

But, that’s not easy, and no one knew that better than the Apostle Paul who dealt with all kinds of conflict. So, he offers in our text a very practical suggestion. Three times, at the end of each of the three verses we read, he encourages us to be thankful. No matter how much you struggle in your relationship with someone, there is always something you can be thankful for. You may have to look pretty hard to find it, but it’s there. Focusing on the good will help you to deal with the bad in such a way that the hope of bringing together what has been torn apart has the best chance of becoming reality.

In her book *The Hiding Place,* Corrie Ten Boom tells a story that she says taught her the principle of how being thankful can change even the worst of situations. As Jews who had been captured by the Nazis during the Second World War, she and her sister, Betsy, were taken to Ravensbruck, a German prison camp. Upon entering the barracks, they found them extremely overcrowded, dirty, and infested with fleas. Betsy told Corrie that they needed to thank the Lord for every detail of their new living quarters. At first, Corrie refused to thank God for the fleas. But, with Betsy’s continued encouragement, she finally gave in and thanked God even for the fleas. During the months they spent in the camp, they were surprised to find how free they were from the abuse of the camp guards while in their barracks. There they could openly sing and pray and talk about God, and even hold Bible Studies and regular worship services with no interference of any kind. It was only after the end of the war and Corrie’s release from the camp that she learned that the guards had refused to enter the barracks because of the fleas.

We can focus on the flea-like characteristics of others, or we can thank God for them, fleas and all, thereby encouraging the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts. It won’t be easy. It may even require some sacrifice and humility on our part, but it will be worth it. As the psalmist wrote, “How sweet it is when people live together in harmony.”