

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-5; Philippians 4:4-9

Title: "An Inner Peace"

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When you think of peace in our world, what comes to mind? Do you picture a calm and tranquil world? One where war, famine, and disease are no more? Do you think of one where all people, regardless of the differences that we may have, live together in harmony? Do you think of a world where no one lives in want and no one is driven by greed? Do you think of the biblical imagery of the wolf living with the lamb? This idealistic world often comes to mind when we think of a world at peace –and this idea of tangible changes to the world and to its people seems in line with that peaceful world that Isaiah describes – one where valleys are lifted, mountains brought low, the rough being made smooth – these images project the idea that a world at peace is one where things have changed in very real ways so that peace can flourish.

And these images of a peaceful world are wonderful images to have and a great ideal to hold on to – because after all, we need that as we go about the work of being Christ's hands and feet in this world – this is after all so much of our work as disciples of the Prince of Peace. But before we can really go about this work of peacemaking – of building that outer peace, those tangible things in our world, we first must find and know our sense of inner peace. Isaiah 40:1 before giving this image of a changed world says, "Comfort, O Comfort my people says your God." God calls us to an inner calm, an inner peace from which our transformative works can begin.

Back in 2007, nearly 2 years after Hurricane Katrina struck the gulf coast, my home church – the church in which my faith was formed and nurtured, was about to embark on a mission trip to the slowly recovering area of New Orleans. You see even though it was almost 2 years after the hurricane, it probably comes as no surprise that there was still much work to be done, many more homes to repair, many more lives to restore, many more opportunities for peacebuilding – for lifting these people up whose lives were damaged. Now, at the time I was a junior in High School and this was going to be

my first mission trip. In fact my brother and I were going together to experience this first together. And we were excited. We were excited to do this work – to help people in need, to be in this small way peacebuilders, kingdom builders. We didn't know exactly what to expect, we had minimal skills in construction, and by minimal I mean virtually nonexistent, but were eager to learn and we just knew that we were supposed to go on this trip to lend our hands and our hearts to this work.

But, there was one little thing that sort of stood in my way – and that was the plane ride. You see this was going to be the first time that I was going to be flying on an airplane. Now, a little background – I am not a huge fan of heights so the idea of being thousands of feet in the air going super-fast – well it was a little terrifying. I was nervous to say the least. But I was also, at the same time, at peace. At peace knowing that this trip was a right and good thing to be going on. That this trip would form and nurture my faith in new ways as this work of kingdom building would be happening. I was at peace know that I needed to go.

Now, that being said, it did not take away the fear. I didn't sleep much the night before – a combination of excitement for the trip and terror for the flight. I said a lot of prayers as we board the plane and even more as we picked up speed on the runway and then I closed my eyes real tight and prayed real hard as those wheels left the ground. And surprisingly, as we hit our cruising altitude, the fear went away and I was able to enjoy the ride – it was like a bus ride through the clouds and when we hit a little turbulence it was no different than hitting some of the potholes back on the roads in Pennsylvania. And then of course I had to pray as we came down, approaching the earth at high speeds and praying fervently until we came to a safe stop.

That flight had its frightening moments, but that inner peace that I felt of knowing that I was doing a good, right, just thing in the work of building a more perfect world carried me. In other words, it did not allow the fear of flying for the first time to undermine the work that was to be done. It did not allow the fear to control me, and though the fear

was certainly still there, that inner peace, that knowing that I was doing the right thing, made it possible to persevere.

Friends, we all need that inner peace that allows us to persevere. The Apostle Paul talks about it, as he is writing to the church in Philippi, when he says “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.” These words, which Paul penned while being imprisoned remind us of that need for inner peace – the need for the God of peace to be with us. That need to know that we are doing the right thing – to know that we are on the right path – that we are fulfilling God’s mission in the world and that such inner peace will get us through whatever challenges come our way. I mean, we see from the ways in which Paul writes, he had that inner peace – knowing that he was on the right path, fulfilling his call as he served his Lord, Jesus Christ, and that inner peace allowed him to hold his faith and persevere through the challenges he was clearly facing since after all he was in prison – and yet from the way he writes you might not know it – he seems so much at peace. He had an inner peace and he calls us to have the same. But now, where does this inner peace come from? Well, as Paul says, it comes from focusing on the things that are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, worthy of praise – where if this is our focus, the God of Peace will meet us there. Inner peace comes when we focus on the good– when we focus on our call as Christ’s church.

I see an inner peace here in this place. And while yes, I am only beginning to get to know all of you and the ministries of this church – I still see it – I see an inner peace. An inner peace in knowing what you as a congregation are called to do as God’s people here in this place. When I saw the church open its doors last night to greet the town with coco and cookies and a warm place to be, I saw a church that has an inner peace in knowing that you are called to be a church of hospitality to the town of Wiscasset.

Focus on that – on that call to be hospitable. When I hear all the good that comes from Summerfest, all the funds raised, all the fun had, all the organizations that benefit I see a faith community that has an inner peace in knowing that you are called to serve. Focus on that! And when I see the way that you greet one another, the ways your energy fills this sanctuary in gathering for worship I see a congregation that has an inner peace in knowing that you are called to rejoice in the Lord and to be Christian community for one another. Focus on that! And while this does not mean that there are not concerns or worries among you, heck every church has them– I still see a church here that has an inner peace knowing that you are called to love God and love people here in this place and I see a church with an inner peace that will not allow the concerns that may come - the worries that may arise - to get in the way of your work in the world. And that is powerful – it is a powerful witness of letting that inner peace carry you as you strive to build God’s kingdom, giving glimpses of a peace-filled world, and beginning that transformation right from this place.

Beloved, as both individuals striving to be Christ’s disciples and as a church striving to be Christ’s hands and feet in the world, continue to find and continue to hold on to that inner peace as you focus on the things that are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, worthy of praise, and allow that inner peace to continue to take hold of you and of your life and of your work as the church.

As we continue our journey ever closer to Christmas, when we will celebrate once more the birth of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, we are reminded of the call for peace – an outer peace that springs forth from an inner peace- an inner peace founded on all the truth that a little child, born in a manger, reveals to us and the world. And from that place of inner peace, continue transforming the world in both small and great ways, all for God’s glory. Amen.