

Lasting Peace

A Sermon by the Rev. Peter Buss, Jr.

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“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

The quest for peace. We begin today with the assertion that all people, whether they know it or not, are on a quest for inner peace. The world we live in can have so much sadness, stress, anxiety, pressure, fear, conflict, danger and suffering. Yet inside each of us is this yearning for harmony, relaxation, compassion, humanity, charity, and calmness.

Think of the variety of things that we as human beings do to strive for these things. People take trips to exotic beach resorts to de-clutter their minds and relax. A soothing bubble bath is a place some people choose to unwind. Some find solace in a long walk through a wooded trail, while others choose to go for a drive instead, and put on some of their favorite music. Some meditate, do yoga, or exercise to get centered. Some seek aroma-therapy or a massage. Some rise early in the morning to watch the sunrise with a cup of coffee. Others like to sit in a chair and read a book after a long day. Others seek self-help books and professional advice, and receive the instruction to get their “wants” in order: Are you content with what you have? Is your attitude in the right place so that you can actually enjoy what you have? Are you trying to do too much? Others come to the conclusion that they really are doing too much, and take measures to simplify their schedules. And some people strive to escape the pressures or stresses of life in the wrong sorts of ways: drunkenness, drugs, abandoning their responsibilities to their family or friends when the going gets tough...

No matter which strategies or practices you take, most of us would readily agree that peace of mind is good, and that stress or anxiety is bad. Surely many of the strategies we’ve just listed will bring a measure of serenity to us, and there is nothing inherently wrong with most of them. But there is transience to the things we’ve explored. The trip comes to an end, the massage is over, the cup of coffee is finished...and all the cares and concerns that we’ve temporarily put on hold are back.

The Lord brings lasting peace. Today we take up this subject that is so central to all of our lives, in the effort to answer the question, *What does our God say brings lasting and genuine peace to our lives?* Not surprisingly, the Lord teaches a tremendous amount about peace in His Word. Listen to these famous passages, and ask yourself what the common theme is:

- “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).
- “I will both lie down in peace and sleep, for you alone O Lord, make me to

dwell in safety.” (Psalm 4:8)

- “The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace” (Psalm 29:11)
- “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).
- “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

The common denominator is the Lord. The Lord can bring lasting peace to His people. In all honesty, that a pretty powerful answer to our question for today. The Lord brings peace to our lives. Simplistic as it may sound, when we include Him in our thinking, when we trust in Him, when we do His will, when we contemplate the things He asks us to contemplate, when we draw on His strength, when we picture Him present with us helping us through whatever it is we’re facing—that is when we experience peace.

“A sword.” The truth is, though, this concept that the Lord brings peace is really just a starting point. There’s more that the Lord has to say about peace—about how we attain it, and what stands in the way of receiving it. The thing is, when we turn to the Lord with a genuine desire for more peace in our lives, we may find that the path He lays before us is not what we expected. Imagine coming to the Lord with an earnest prayer for greater peace in our lives, and hearing Him say this: “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). What a contrast to the sayings we’ve looked at so far.

Contrary to the appearance, however, there is absolutely no dissonance between this saying, and the others, when viewed correctly. A sword is obviously a symbol for combat. It is “the sword of truth combating” (*Arcana Caelestia* 2799). What’s being addressed here is the battles we can wage in our lives, together with the Lord, against all the things that lead away from peace. His message time and time again is that His kingdom is a place where peace reigns, but the gift of peace can only be given to those who work for it. In other words we can’t ask the Lord for peace, but then do the very things that take peace away from our lives. So the Lord says, “My peace I give to you.” What peace? The peace that comes from doing as the Lord has spoken. “These things I have spoken, that in Me you may have peace” (John 16:33). What things has He spoken? Many things in His Word about what it means to obey Him and what constitutes disobedience. “Great peace have those who love Your law and nothing causes them to stumble” (Psalm 119:165). “Mark the blameless person, and observe the upright; for the future of that one is peace” (Psalm 37:37).

A challenging principle. Continuing with this theme of rethinking what brings peace, we come to a principle about peace that challenges our logic. “All unrest is the result of evil and falsity, and all peace the result of goodness and truth” (*Arcana Caelestia* 3170). This is something each of us could think about for some time. What it means is that behind any anxiety, stress, disquiet of mind, argument or conflict there will be some

evil, hurtful or self-serving motive at play, or some false idea that is causing trouble. It also means that whenever we experience inner peace, it is the result of some loving affection or action, some compassion or helpful expression of goodwill, or some true idea that the mind is latching onto. The invitation, then, is to test this principle and see if it is one that we can embrace.

One story that illustrates this principle perhaps more vividly than any other is the miracle of the calming of the sea that we heard earlier in the service. As we recall, the disciples were on a boat in the middle of the sea when “a great windstorm arose, [causing] the waves [to] beat into the boat, so that it was already filling” (Mark 4:37). The wind and the waves, and the feeling of being completely out of control stand for those times in life when evil and falsity are causing trouble. Whenever we feel like our lives are out of control in ways pictured by this stormy sea, we would do well to ask ourselves what is causing it. The principle that we’re working with says that some form of evil or falsity, in us or in others, is at play. We can think of that evil and falsity as whatever is hurtful to human beings and healthy relationships. It’s the angry person, the lustful person, the person who belittles others or uses them in cruel ways. If that person is us, even in subtle ways, it can create storms in our relationships. And if that person is someone else, it can also create storms in our lives.

So what do we do? Like the disciples in the story, we turn to the Lord to ask Him for help. In the story, the situation miraculously resolves itself. The Lord “arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace, be still!’ And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. (Mark 4:39). While it is true that the simple act of turning to the Lord for help—giving up on that false sense that I’m alone in handling the storms in my life—can bring a calm within, more often than not there’s a part we are asked to play in the process of resolving what is going on. In other words, the Lord is going to ask us to be a peacemaker in the situation. That could mean we acknowledge our part in creating the storm. It could mean we ask for the Lord’s help to deal with the storm created by others in ways that lead to solutions rather than escalations. It could mean that we pray for His help to do something good in the situation—extending an offer to stop the strife and work toward solutions, or apologizing for our part in it, or redouble our efforts to be a loving human being in that situation. What we will tend to find, to the extent that we genuinely extend ourselves in this direction, is the other side of the equation: all peace is the result of goodness and truth. The Lord can calm the storm when reasonable people start acting in the ways He teaches them to.

Examples. Well let’s explore how this fundamental principle, illustrated by the calming of the sea, that all unrest is the result of evil and falsity, and all peace is the result of goodness and truth. Think of any argument that two people have. Whatever the subject, would we not agree that in most cases there is something self-centered at the heart? My will, my ideas, my stubbornness or desire to be right—that’s what leads to arguments. There is a raising up of self, and less of a focus on others, much less the Lord. Lo and behold, this leads away from peace in that relationship.

Take another example of a person captivated by lust. What does it lead a person to do? Views things online that he or she shouldn’t, focus on the way others look, and

entertain impure thoughts about them. There's a lot of secrecy and anxiety and guilt that comes in that context—the fear of being discovered, and guilt over what's going on in the realm of the mind. In other words, this permission takes away peace.

Or consider the terrible example of abuse—someone who intentionally hurts another human being. What a storm that creates in the lives of all involved—the person abused, the abuser, and everyone else who comes near that situation.

Take another example—trust in self. What does that look like in our lives? “I have to figure it all out, keep on top of it all, make sure everything goes right.” “I have to be the glue that holds things together.” “I have to be the strong one.” Where do such thoughts and attitudes lead? Stress, anxiety, pressure, loneliness, self-pity, and a host of other things which destroy peace.

Contrast that with one who regularly turns to the Lord for help—who prays often for guidance, who truly believes that the Lord, in His providence, will bring goodness to our lives in exchange for our genuine efforts to do what is right. There may still need to be strength, decisiveness, and an effort to keep a lot of balls in the air at once, but with the Lord it can be done with an inner kind of peace—the trust that the Lord is with us through it all.

What about friends helping friends? How nice it is to have friends with whom you can trade favors! It could be an offer to watch a child, or do an errand, or listen with a sympathetic ear to how the day has gone. Certainly doing extra things for each other can add busyness to our lives, but isn't it also true that it's a great feeling to have friends we can trade favors with? The goodness exhibited is a source of peace.

Finally we could think about a celebration of a fiftieth wedding anniversary. Picture some siblings throwing a big party to celebrate this milestone of their parents. Again, the effort involved may add quite a lot to the plate for a while. But think of the outcome: the laughter, the testimonials, the gifts, the celebration of something truly worthwhile. And think of the feeling that those people will have when the celebration has successfully happened. Each person would go home with a happy feeling of peace inside thinking, “Something really good happened today.”

Conclusion. All of us human beings are on a quest for peace. It is something our souls long for, which leads us to engage in all kinds of activities that we believe might lead to peace. The trips, massages, walks, dinners out, and so forth will provide small oases in the busyness of life, and with prudence, they have their place in a balanced life. But the truest answer to the soul's longing is a kind of peace that can only come from the Lord and a life dedicated to His teachings. The more we grasp this, the more we can come to experience a peace that is “immensely superior” to anything the world has to offer (*Arcana Coelestia* 5662). So long as we are engaged in an effort to rid ourselves of self-serving desires, and working to become more devoted to the Lord and His ways, it matters not, really, what kind of chaos might be going on around us. With a life truly centered on the Lord's Word, we will attain from the Lord a peace within, that will help us walk with Him through the valley of the shadow of death, with the sure knowledge that He is with us. We will be testimonies to the Psalms, which teach us to

“Mark the blameless person, and observe the upright; for the future of that one is peace” (Psalm 37:37). For we will believe in our hearts what the Lord said to His disciples so many years ago, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). **Amen.**

Readings from the Lord’s Word: Numbers 6:22-27; Mark 4:35-41; John 14:27, 16:32-33; *Arcana Caelestia* 5662, 3170.

Numbers 6

²²And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²³“Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:

²⁴ “The LORD bless you and keep you;

²⁵ The LORD make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;

²⁶ The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace.”

²⁷“So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”

Mark 4

³⁵On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, “Let us cross over to the other side.” ³⁶Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. ³⁷And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. ³⁸But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?”

³⁹Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace, be still!” And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰But He said to them, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” ⁴¹And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!”

John 14

[Jesus said,] ²⁷“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

John 16

³²Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. ³³These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Arcana Caelestia 5662

‘And he said, Peace to you, do not be afraid’ means that all is well...

The reason 'peace' means 'all is well,' is that peace is what is central and consequently what reigns universally within every single thing in heaven. For the peace that reigns in heaven is like spring on earth, or like the dawn. What moves a person's feelings when spring or dawn arrives is not the discernible changes that take place then,

but the loveliness reigning universally, which pervades every individual thing he or she perceives and fills not only that perception but also each individual object with loveliness...

Almost everyone believes that peace consists in being kept safe from enemies and in serenity reigning at home and among companions. That kind of peace is not however what is meant here but another kind that is immensely superior, namely heavenly peace, described immediately above. No one can be granted this peace unless they are led by the Lord and abide in the Lord, that is, unless they are in heaven where the Lord is the All in all. For heavenly peace enters in when the desires that spring from self-love and love of the world are removed; for those desires take peace away...

Arcana Caelestia 3170

When spiritual things are being appropriated to the natural person, those things depart which are all part of evil desire and false persuasion, and so things which cause unrest; and those come in which are part of the affection for goodness and truth, and so the things that bring peace. For all unrest is the result of evil and falsity, and all peace the result of goodness and truth.