

Sunday, June 23, 2024

FIRST LESSON: Ezekiel 37: 1–3

GOSPEL READING: Mark 4: 35–41

Sermon Series: Living: Peace

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

Good morning Beloved Community! We are continuing with our sermon series entitled “Living.” The goal of this sermon series is for us to explore how we might begin to take the steps of living the life that I believe Jesus desires all of us to live- a life of abundance In every way.

- This week’s topic will focus on living in peace.
- First, I would like us to explore what is peace?
- In traditional terms and understanding, **peace is often defined** as the absence of conflict, war, or violence.
- It is a tranquility and harmony where societies and individuals coexist without hostility.

- This understanding of peace is rooted in the idea of **negative peace**, where the focus is on what is absent rather than what is present.
- In this sense, **the term negative focuses** on what needs to be negated and or eliminated so that harmony can exist.
- For instance, some of us work with difficult folk in our workplaces....can I get an Amen!
- Therefore, in those instances, one might venture to think to themselves, “My job would be so much better if I didn’t have to deal with so and so’s attitude, harassment, behavior...etc.!”
- I’m also thinking of students in schools, “If my school did not have this type of bullying behavior, I would be much happier going to school.”
- This and more would be examples of **negative peace**.
- Expanding this concept of **negative peace** to a worldwide level, there are traditional symbols of

peace, such as the dove or the olive branch, that evoke images of calm, stillness, and the cessation of aggressive actions.

- This conception of peace is frequently associated with political stability, where governments and institutions function without disruption from violent conflicts.
- Historically, peace treaties and agreements have been central to this understanding, marking the end of wars and conflicts.
- These treaties often establish boundaries, lay down rules for future interactions, and seek to prevent further violence.
- The traditional perspective emphasizes the importance of order, law, and diplomacy in maintaining peace.
- The focus is on creating systems and structures that can mitigate disputes and manage tensions, ensuring that conflicts are resolved through

dialogue and negotiation rather than through force.

- What makes these examples of **negative peace** is still similar to the work and school analogy that I shared earlier, **for peace can only ultimately come** if tensions, conflicts, dissension, and wars are ceased or negated.
- Another great example of **negative peace** is with Justice in Action regarding pre-trial diversion programs; our justice initiative aims to eliminate costly fees that prevent people from gaining access to these valuable diversion programs that statistically prove to reduce the rate of recidivism and allow people a second chance.
- All of this and more reveals to us that striving for **negative peace** is a great thing.
- For I would love to live in a world where there is no war, no racism, no hate, and no discrimination!

- Switching gears a bit, from a social justice perspective, peace is more than just the absence of violence or conflict; **it is the presence of** justice, equality, and the fulfillment of human rights.
- This understanding of peace is often called **positive peace**, encompassing social, economic, and environmental dimensions.
- **Positive peace** addresses the root causes of conflict and violence, such as poverty, inequality, discrimination, and injustice.
- **Positive peace** does not mean it is better than the negative peace we discussed earlier.
- Instead, **positive peace** means that we as a community, society, and world would need to add resources and opportunities to the situation/ circumstance so that it might improve the quality of life for another individual or community.

- For example, with Justice in Action, as members of this justice initiative, we aim to implement **positive peace** initiatives to improve community issues.
- In our pursuit of affordable housing for instance, **the positive peace** solution we aim to implement is adding a pre-eviction mediation program for landlords and tenants to work through their conflicts to reduce evictions.
- In our mental health initiative, **our positive peace solution** was to advocate for a mental health navigator system to help make mental health resources more accessible to individuals.
- So what does all of this mean, and where does our gospel this morning fit into this conversation?
- The Holy Spirit planted an idea in my heart and mind for our consideration as a result of our conversation of how to live in peace, and the way

it was given to me was in the form of what I would call a **spiritual mathematic equation**.

- All the math I had to take in my undergrad mechanical engineering studies is finally paying off!
- So, the spiritual mathematic equation I would like to present for our consideration this morning is: **extend peace+receive peace=living peace**.
- What is involved in **extending peace** (regardless of whether it is the negative or positive peace we discussed earlier); it is my ultimate belief that one aspect of how we are to live our lives is by making sure that we are extending peace.
- The journey **to extending peace** begins within.
- Inner peace is the foundation upon which external peace is built.
- Practices such as mindfulness, meditation, and self-reflection enable us to understand and

manage our emotions, reducing stress and fostering a sense of calm.

- When we are at peace with ourselves, we are better equipped to handle life's challenges and interact with others positively and constructively.
- In the same regard, I believe the other aspect of our lives is **learning how to receive peace**.
- It is my belief that the ability **to receive peace** is essential for our mental, emotional, and physical well-being.
- **Receiving peace** allows us to navigate life's challenges with resilience and grace.
- **Receiving peace** provides a clear and focused mind.
- When we are at peace, we can think more clearly, make better decisions, and approach problems calmly and rationally.
- Learning the art of how to implement the two together in our lives **of extending peace and**

receiving peace then becomes that transformative force that can heal, restore, and uplift, thereby yielding a life of intrinsic and holistic peace.

- This Church family is the true essence of what Jesus was trying to teach the disciples then and us today in our gospel story.
- In Mark 4:35-41, we encounter a powerful narrative where Jesus calms the storm, demonstrating his divine authority and teaching profound lessons about faith and peace.
- This passage provides historical and theological insights and beautifully ties in the concepts of extending peace and receiving peace.
- Mark 4:35-41 takes place on the Sea of Galilee, a significant body of water in the region where Jesus conducted much of his ministry.

- Known for its sudden and violent storms, the Sea of Galilee symbolizes the unpredictability and chaos of life.
- Jesus and his disciples had spent the day teaching and ministering to large crowds. As evening approached, Jesus suggested crossing to the other side of the lake.
- As they sailed, a furious storm arose, with waves breaking over the boat, threatening to sink it.
- Despite the peril, Jesus was asleep on a cushion in the stern. The disciples, terrified, woke him, exclaiming, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Jesus then rose, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!"
- The storm ceased, and there was a great calm. He asked his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" The disciples were filled with awe and questioned among themselves,

"Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

- In this passage, **Jesus extends peace** in a tangible and transformative way.
- His command over the storm illustrates his divine power and authority, extending peace to the chaotic natural elements.
- More importantly, **Jesus extends peace** to his disciples, who are paralyzed by fear and uncertainty.
- Calming the storm is a metaphor for the peace Jesus offers amid life's tumultuous circumstances.
- By addressing their fear and demonstrating his control over the situation, Jesus provides a profound lesson in trust and faith.
- Jesus's words, "Quiet! Be still!" **are not just directed at the storm but also at the hearts of the disciples**, urging them to find peace through faith in him.

- The disciples' reaction to the storm and Jesus' calming of it highlights **the challenge of receiving peace.**
- Despite being in the presence of Jesus, witnessing his miracles, and hearing his teachings, the disciples struggle with fear and doubt. Their question, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" reveals their anxiety and lack of trust.
- **Receiving peace** requires faith and the willingness to surrender our fears and uncertainties to God.
- Jesus' rebuke, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" underscores the importance of **trust in receiving peace.**
- The disciples' awe and their question, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" mark a moment of revelation and growth in their understanding of Jesus' divine nature.

- **Applying all of this to our present situation; in searching for a contextual example of an organization that embodies this spiritual mathematic equation: extend peace+ receive peace =living peace;**
- At the United Women in Faith meeting, I was blessed to be a part of this past Thursday evening's presentation from the Lincoln Littles organization, which was presented by their executive director, Anne Brandt;.
- Anne painted a vivid picture of the childcare crisis that revealed staggering statistics regarding the childcare needs of our local children of Lincoln, Nebraska.
- **We learned** that the yearly cost of childcare for one child is estimated at \$19,224 for infants, \$17,721 for toddlers, and \$15,490 for preschoolers, all of which equates to more than funding a student in college.

- **We learned** the financial need for public/private partnerships and perpetual public funding to address the \$570,000,000 million dollar yearly gap needed to make childcare accessible is crucial.
- Despite these harrowing challenges, how Lincoln Littles rises up to the spiritual mathematic equation is by extending peace through their mission of striving for all children to have access to high-quality early care and education, which leads to a more available workforce today and a smarter workforce tomorrow.
- **It is a mission** that, in return, models receiving peace to the parents/caregivers that can have some peace of mind that their children will be healthy and safe, be able to establish routines, thrive in stimulating environments of exploration, learning, play, and more.
- **It is a mission that**, as a result of this organization leading in this balance of extending and receiving

peace, the community as a whole can live and thrive in peace together, spiritually, physically, and economically.

- This and more Church family are in my biblical imagination of how Jesus could sleep amid a windy, violent storm.
- When you and I embody the art of extending and receiving peace, we are, in effect, living our purpose;
- We are, in effect, doing as our founder of Methodism, John Wesley instructs us to do: *Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.*

- This in my mind is how we cultivate a life of peace for others and ourselves;
- Where in this way of living, somewhere and somehow the winds of broken marriages will die down;
- Somewhere somehow the winds of job difficulties and drama will die down;
- Somewhere, somehow, the winds, of our family dynamics, and tension will die down
- Somewhere, somehow, the winds of church dissensions and tensions will die down
- Somewhere, somehow, the tumultuous winds of whatever our circumstance or situation will die down so that you and I can have rest.
- John 14:27 , "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.

- Hebrews 4:10 For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his."
- May the Words from my mouth and the thoughts of our collective hearts be acceptable in your holy and righteous sight our Lord our Rock, the Great Peacemaker and Extender....Amen!
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