

**BYOB (Bring Your Own Brain)  
Finding Peace in a Crazy World**

September 3 & 4, 2011

A Pentecost 12 2011

Loosely based on Psalm 119, Romans 13: and 8-14 and Matthew 18:15:-20

This weekend is the last in our BYOB, “Bring your own brain” series. Each week’s preaching topic answered questions asked by members last spring. Honestly it was one of the most challenging and rewarding series. Your comments after church, e-mails, face book entries and continued discussions indicate, I hope, that they were at least faith provoking.

Today I am responding to this final request: *Read: Please tell me how I can find peace in this crazy world. I think it has something to do with the attitude of gratitude..*

I think it is a fitting way to end our series, because after all is said and done,...

Don’t we all, in the end, **seek peace in our lives?**

Don’t we want the **anxiety**, the **feelings of helplessness** in the face of world tragedies, the **restlessness**, the **grief**, the **fears**, the **guilt**, and the **endless hunger and thirst for more more more** to stop?

Don’t we long for the **rat race** of our lives to slow to a manageable pace and the **elephant in the room** to disappear?

Peace is what we want!

Give me peace Lord. Give me peace!

...and perhaps, once in a while, a little joy!

There are lots of promises of peace out there that raise our hopes. They often begin with the words...”If only...”

**If only** I could loose 10 lbs...

**If only** I had an extra \$50,000 to pay off my bills...and maybe get a newer car...

**If only** my husband were different...

**If only** we had a different governor...

**If only** the market place was truly free ...

**If only** I hadn’t had the childhood I had...

**If only** I could turn back the clock...

**If only, If only...**

We know, though, in our heart of hearts, **that if** our “if only” prayers **were** answered, there would be one more challenge to our peace, and then another . We live in a fallen world after all.

However we are not left abandoned. This is Jesus’ promise to all of us. As people of faith we **are** promised peace, not only in Heaven, but **here, right now**, in this moment and in this place...*the peace which surpasses all understanding.*  
*(Philippians 4:7)*

Whether aware of it or not, the member who wrote today’s sermon request has provided **God’s answer** in his question. Furthermore, his comments reflect a deep understanding of Paul’s closing remarks in his letter to the Philippians( 4:4-7) Listen to this: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

The heart of this passage is the threefold expression of Jewish piety--rejoicing in the Lord, prayer and thanksgiving.

Paul has applied it to the Christian faith: Ultimate Peace, Peace with staying power, i.e. *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,...*

...is rooted in the practice of **rejoicing, prayer and thanksgiving.**

**Rejoicing...**

**Prayer...**

**And thanksgiving...that’s the Christian version of “The Attitude of Gratitude.”**

The attitude of gratitude may be easier said than done but gratitude does spring up in some very unusual places.

We’ve seen it on our mission trips to places like New Orleans, still recovering from Katrina, in Guatemala from children with nothing to play with but deflated ball, owned by the whole neighborhood.

(Ruth and I have been/Ed you no doubt have been surprised by gratitude in the homes of our shut-ins and places like Bethel home and Valhaven.)

Some of you have read words of gratitude in letters from your sons and daughters over seas serving in the military and Peace Corp.

This week, Bill and I received a printed letter sent to a long list of people from a friend who is dying of cancer, with only days or weeks to live. He no longer has the strength to answer cards and return phone calls. So, one letter for all of us.

Though he did not use the words, the whole text reflected a peace, rooted in his profound gratitude for a full life and for time at the end for the gathering of family, the words of love and appreciation spoken, catching one more fish, a canoe ride around his beloved lake, the joy of grandchildren.

This is not, “Well it could have been worse” kind of gratitude.

Rather it is the gratitude rooted in seeing each moment of life as a gift and in the knowledge that where there is nothing, God has the power to create something.

Where there is death, God brings life.

Christian gratitude flows from the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Of course this kind of gratitude is ultimately a gift from the spirit, so I can’t just command you to “be more grateful” and you will be.

Only God will give the growth.

But as people of faith, we can sort of make a place ready for gratitude to sprout and grow, like a gardener tending a garden.

In her book Attitudes of Gratitude, M.J. Ryan lists several **practices that will support gratitude and foster peace.**

**Exercise Daily**—There is a sign over a coffee shop door that says *As you wander on through life, sister/brother, whatever be your goal, keep your eye upon the donut, and not upon the hole.*

We can practice being positive every day, finding one thing, even one seemingly insignificant thing for which to be grateful. Like exercise, the more we practice the easier it becomes.

**Do the Work of Forgiveness**—never an easy thing but we have been freely forgiven by God and knowing that may enable us to forgive others.

If someone or something has hurt us deeply, it is human to feel hurt and betrayed and angry, even angry at God and we need to give ourselves time to grieve.

However, eventually, in God’s time, there is the possibility for forgiveness.

Offering forgiveness frees us from the past and gives us the power to move ahead.

Forgiveness leads to peace, inner peace and peace in the family or community.

**Practice Wonderment and as they say, Take time to smell the Roses.**

Bill and I were at the Bay Beach Wildlife sanctuary.

We were the only ones without little kids. All the parents were saying “oh look at that Owl up there” or “See that coyote.” And the little kids were all looking at things we were missing like pretty leaves, yellow dandelions, bugs and sparrows. They didn’t need to be taught to wonder.

**Focus on what is right and embrace what shows up in our lives.**

How would life change if we focus on our assets rather than our shortcomings and if we recognize that what just shows up in our life may not be what we wanted but rather what we need? Have you always wanted a Siamese cat? Maybe the stray cat that shows up at your door is what you need.

Didn’t like the speeding ticket you got? Maybe driving slower will keep you out of trouble.

**Live generously no matter what your financial circumstance.** We all have something to share and when we do share with others we spread joy around. We start thinking about our abundance of gifts.

Okay that’s enough for today, a partial list but something to think about and try in the week ahead.

I close with the words of Psalm 106, 107, 118: *O give thanks to the Lord for he is good! And God’s steadfast love endures forever.*

This is the good news from which all gratitude springs.

This is the good news of the gospel.

