

Pastor's Message – 3/3/24  
Guided to the Cross – Guided to Peace  
Isaiah 53:4-5  
Colossians 1:15-20  
Luke 23:44-46

As the Pastor of this Church and involved in the Committees and activities of the Church, I see it firsthand. Even beyond the Church, as Chair of the Conference Council of Finance and Administration and Chair of the Waupun Area Christian Ministerium Association, I see it firsthand. And with the other groups and activities, like the pickleball groups I am involved in, I see it firsthand. I am involved in the scheduling of many of these events and it can be challenging to get everyone together. Even Sunday worship is not immune. People have so many activities and commitments that pull them one way or another, making it impossible to be part of everything and impossible to do everything.

As you may already be aware, the Waupun United Methodist Church is taking time during this year's Lenten season to focus on a Guided to the Cross-worship series: in Sunday worship services and Wednesday evening Bible studies. We have already reflected on how we are guided to the cross and the forgiveness offered to us in Jesus' death on the cross. We have seen how, as we are guided to the cross, we can find "strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow:" – not a "maybe it will happen" hope, but an assurance and belief and confidence in Christ's victory over sin and death and the promise of salvation for all who believe in him. Today, we are taking a look at how we are "Guided to Peace" in this year's Lenten season.

Peace can be hard to come by these days. We are so busy running from one thing to another, and we are surrounded by sounds of people all around us at home or at work or at school. Any quiet moments we have can be instantly interrupted by our phones ringing or a siren blaring or a car honking or a video or some music playing. Our lack of peace in our day may be one reason why meditation and no-technology retreats are popular.

Finding time for silence may be one way that we have been guided toward what the world thinks of peace. But we as Christians know

there is a deeper kind of peace that we are craving as human beings. That is peace with God.

Because of the entrance of sin into the world at the Garden of Eden, human beings have not had peace with God. That is, we have not had a right relationship with God because our sin cuts us off from God and does not make us one with him. That is, we often wonder if only we are good enough, God can love us. We wonder and struggle at finding time to be alone with God.

Our own sinfulness and the sinfulness of humanity keep us away from God. Think about how Adam and Eve were banished from the perfection of the Garden of Eden when they sinned and how sin kept them at a distance from God and made their lives difficult. Remember the story from the Book of Genesis:

*<sup>8</sup> Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> So the LORD God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"*

*<sup>10</sup> And he said, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid."*

*<sup>11</sup> Then he asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" (Genesis 2:8-11)*

You all know the answer to that question.

We who are the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve have indeed been born sinful. It is called original sin. In addition, each one of us has sinned in our thoughts, words, and deeds apart from that original sin. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," St. Paul reminds us in Romans 3:23. There is no getting around that fact. There is no sugarcoating that or glossing over that reality.

We are sinners. God knows it, and we know it, and there is no peace in that. That is why God declared a plan to save humanity. God made it clear that he would send a Savior born of a woman to reunite us to himself and crush the power of sin and death. For thousands of years, the prophets announced through the prophets that a Savior would come into the world, just as God had promised. But people throughout history would not listen. They tried to make peace with God, tried to become equal with God by building a tower to the sky, the Tower of Babel. But that did not work out. They followed other gods, a certain golden calf comes to mind, which could not have a plan or the means for salvation

for them. But those false gods did not save them. They tried to overpower other nations to save themselves from destruction, but in the process, they were overpowered by others.

Then into this broken and divided world, God sent his Son, Jesus, as a baby, born of a woman, to take on our flesh and blood as a human being who was also fully God. He led a sinless life, and he and his Father were one. Jesus spent his time on earth telling his disciples, and anyone who would listen, that he was the one who would bring the world peace. At the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, the Lord read these words from the prophet Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Isaiah 61:1-2). Then he said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). But the people there did not believe him and drove him out of town, threatening to throw him off a cliff. There was no peace that day.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” (Luke 9:22). But they did not listen or pay attention. Peter even took Jesus aside and said, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Matthew 16:22). He did not want this to happen to his Master. And I wonder if we don’t feel the same.

But Jesus knows the mission to bring peace to the world: To bring peace between us sinners and God must include the cross. He did not turn away from his mission, even when he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives and an angry mob moved into that seemingly quiet place where the disciples were sleeping. Jesus said to his disciples, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand” (Mark 14:41-42).

At Jesus’ arrest, Peter again did not want Jesus to go down this road of suffering. So, he pulled out his sword and cut off the ear of a servant there. But Jesus said, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52). Jesus

sought peace even then, even in the midst of turmoil and personal threat.

Ultimately, it was on the cross that peace between us and God came. When the crucified Jesus breathed his last, the Bible says, “And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many” (Matthew 27:51-53). What do these verses tell us? They tell us that because of Jesus’ death on the cross, we now have access to the Father. We can approach him in the most Holy of Holies. The barrier of death is destroyed. Death no longer separates us from God. We can have new life in Christ, which will soon be revealed to us more fully on Easter, when Jesus’ tomb was open and he himself rose from the dead.

Thus, the cross has become a sign of peace for us in our church today. There is a cross painted on the ceiling above us in this church. There is a large cross right in front of you – hanging on the wall. The two banners behind me are filled with various kinds of crosses. The cross is God’s offer of peace to all who choose to accept it and, it is our privilege to offer that same peace to others.

When we share his peace, we are reminded of the words of Jesus: shortly before his crucifixion: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27). There is great comfort in these words, and there is great confidence. Jesus says later, “And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe” (John 14:29). He is talking about his suffering, Passion, and death here.

He is saying to the disciples, and he is saying to you and me, “When you see me on the cross, remember what I said. Remember that what you are witnessing is me bringing lasting, eternal peace—peace that will connect you to God the Father always.”

So, as we are guided to the cross and its forgiveness and hope, we are also guided to the cross and peace. As we live in that peace and as we interact with one another this Lent and beyond, the peace of Christ can be with us and our world. Amen.