



FIRST  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
SPARTANBURG

## THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: PEACE

Genesis 33:1-11; Ephesians 6:10-17

July 11, 2021

Dr. Lewis F. Galloway

How often we struggle to live in peace with others! When a relationship strains and breaks, where does the responsibility lie? Sometimes in the other person; sometimes in me; most likely in both. Making peace is about more than a dozen roses. Making peace with others is about an inward and an outward journey.

First the inward journey. Paul declares that the path to peace is through the Spirit working in the human heart. Only the work of God's Spirit within us is strong enough to overcome the inclination of our sinful nature to quarrelling, anger, grudges, and strife. Only the work of God's Spirit is powerful enough to stop us from using people as if they were objects for our own selfish purposes.

Each one of us may face a different struggle or have a particular area where we fall short and need to grow. If we are judgmental, intolerant, self-righteous, angry, jealous, self-deceived, or proud, there are some things that need to change within us before we can make peace with others. We have an inward spiritual journey to make before we can reach out to others.

When Bunny and I travel between Black Mountain and Spartanburg, we must plan our trip, pack our

belongings, close the house, fill up the car in order to reach our destination with the things we need. A purposeful journey does not just happen. In the same way, the inner journey that leads to peace with others requires preparation and effort. Therefore, we speak in the church of the spiritual practices of prayer, Bible study, worship, service, fellowship, and giving, among others. It is through the discipline of these spiritual practices that we get our hearts and minds in shape to live in peace with others.

Louis Zamperini, the Olympic runner and WWII bombardier, drifted for 47 days in the Pacific Ocean on a raft. Hungry and dehydrated, he was captured by the Japanese and held in a POW camp until the end of the war. No one could have expected him to survive days at sea without adequate food or water or months of vicious beatings, deprivation, and torture in the camp. Long after the war, he returned to Japan to forgive his most brutal guard. It did not just happen. His spiritual journey, described in the book, *Unbroken*, led him from being a defeated, bitter, and alcoholic man to being a servant of Christ. When his life was falling apart, he came to know Christ through a Billy Graham crusade. It was Jesus who enabled

him to put his life together. It took spiritual discipline for him to be able to write his captor, "As a result of my prisoner of war experience under your unwarranted and unreasonable punishment, my post-war life became a nightmare ... but thanks to a confrontation with God ... I committed my life to Christ. Love replaced the hate I had for you" ("The Defiant Ones," *Wall Street Journal*, 11/12/10). He discovered a deep peace within that enabled him to make peace with his enemies.

The greatest strength for making peace comes from within. In Ephesians, Paul compares the resources necessary to live a faithful life to the equipment of a soldier dressed for battle. Paul reminds us that we are contending not against flesh and blood, but against cosmic powers and forces of evil. Anyone who has ever stood against injustice, violence, prejudice, immorality, or gossip knows the virulent, systemic, and larger-than-life power of these evils. We need the weapons of the Spirit to defeat the destructive power of evil. Just as a soldier needs a helmet, shield, boots, armor, belt, and weapons, we need to be dressed in the whole armor of God. Paul describes these as the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith,

the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Paul says, "As shoes for your feet, put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace." (Ephesians 6:15). We cannot get anywhere without the right kind of shoes. You cannot run a marathon, walk through a field of thorns, cross hot pavement in the summer sun, or dance all night, without the right kind of shoes. We cannot make peace with others until we walk in the shoes of peace.

Before Jacob could face his brother Esau, whom he had tricked out of his birthright and his father's blessing, he had some spiritual work to do. He had an inward journey to make. After all those years of living by his wits and making his way by deceit and trickery, Jacob was on the road home to face the music. He had no idea what kind of music his injured brother was going to play. The road became a spiritual journey. On the road he came face to face with God. At a riverbank, he wrestled until dawn with an angel of God. God gave Jacob a new name – Israel – which means the one who wrestles or contends with God. The angel threw Jacob's hip out of joint. From that day on, this man would walk with a limp to remind him of how God changed his life. Now he was ready to meet his brother.

This brings us to the outward journey to peace. Jesus says that if we are making our offering in

worship and remember that our brother or sister has something against us, then we are to go and make peace, and then return to give our offering. We cannot pretend to live in peace with God if we are not living in peace with others. We cannot play the piety game when we harbor bitterness toward others or when our relationships lie shattered on the ground. Someone might be quick to say, "Hold on, preacher. The Bible also says, '*in so far as it depends on you, live in peace with all people.*'" (Romans 12:18) I would simply respond, "It depends on us a lot more than we would like to think."

It was Esau, the one who had been betrayed, who became the peacemaker. Esau ran to meet his brother with his robes flying in the wind and his sandals slapping his feet. Esau embraced Jacob and kissed him. He did it not because of all the flocks and herds that Jacob sent ahead as gifts; he did it for the sake of peace. All Jacob could do was exclaim, "To see your face is like seeing the face of God since you have received me with such favor."

Elwin Wilson was a Rock Hill, South Carolina native and former member of the KKK. He spent much of life acting out his hatred against black people. He kept blacks out of his neighborhood, burned crosses in yards, and committed many other acts of violence. In 1961, he beat John Lewis who was then a young

Freedom Rider trying to integrate the white waiting room at the Rock Hill bus station. John Lewis eventually became a congressman from Georgia; Elwin Wilson continued a life of racial hatred. In more recent years, Elwin Wilson began to have remorse about the things he had done. He wanted peace with God; he knew that he could not find peace until he made peace with others. In 2009, he came to John Lewis to confess to being the one who had beaten him almost 50 years before. He came to ask for forgiveness. Congressman Lewis forgave him; the men embraced. It was God working in his heart – taking away the bitterness and the hatred and giving him the gift of peace. It was the inward journey that allowed him to make the outward journey to Congressman Lewis's office.

We live in a world of violence. The violence is not just in distant lands where ethnic, ideological, and religious conflicts fuel acts of terror, injustice, and war. The violence is here in our own homes, community, and nation. The violence is not only "out there" but "in here" – in our own hearts where suspicion, fear, anger, and envy lead us to think hateful thoughts, speak bitter words and do hurtful acts.

The scholar Richard Hayes wrote in his study of biblical ethics, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, that the greatest moral failure of the church as it

seeks to follow Jesus is its acceptance of violence. We have not only accepted violence, but the church has at times justified and embraced violence in the treatment of others. The Bible calls us to reject violence and hatred and put on the shoes that equip us to proclaim the gospel of peace. I have seen that peace in people who wear nurse's shoes, work boots, sandals, football cleats, wing tips, and topsiders. Paul says to put on whatever it takes for you to preach peace wherever you live, wherever you work, and wherever you go.

I had the privilege of visiting a woman who was well over 90 and was in hospice care. She showed by example how to live a life of useful service, grace, and hard work. A stroke had left her unable to walk. She was still one of the strongest people I have known. All the Marvel Comic's superheroes had nothing on her. The strength of God's peace shone through her. She told me and her family that she was ready to die and be with Jesus. Her husband had died forty years before. With a twinkle in her eye, she said that when she got to heaven the first thing she was going to do was give her husband a huge kiss. There she was at the end of her life full of joy, hope, and peace. After we said a prayer together, I looked down at her feet and saw all the shoes she needed to proclaim the gospel of peace were a pair of bedroom slippers.

Who is the one person you could call, write, or visit today that would take you on the first step of the journey to peace? In what situation in our church or community can you be a messenger of the gospel of peace? It does not really matter who was right, who was wrong, or who started the fight. What matters is how it is going to end. God shows us the path to peace is an inward journey and an outward journey. The shoes you have on today may be just the ones you need to make the trip.

Celtic Benediction:

Deep peace of the  
running wave to you.

Deep peace of the  
flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the  
quiet earth to you.

Deep peace of the  
shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the  
Son of Peace to you.