

Streetsville United Church  
Sunday, May 16, 2010  
Rev. John Tapscott

"PEACE FOR THE TROUBLED HEART"

John 14:27

On the night before he died Jesus was with his disciples in the Upper Room. The disciples' hearts were troubled and afraid. And it was clear why. "I am going away," he said. They had depended on his guidance, his help, his presence. But Jesus was about to die on a Cross and leave them. Now what would happen to them? What would the future hold with their Master gone?" Jesus knew how they were feeling and so told them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled; neither let them be afraid." But before giving this command he gave them a gift which made which it possible. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives..." (John 14:27)

I know from personal and pastoral experience that we often have troubled and fearful hearts. Our hearts feel this way because of what's going on in our personal lives, at work, or perhaps because of our health or because of what's going on in the world or the situation of a loved one. Our hearts may be troubled by thoughts of the past or because of the unknown future. And when our hearts are troubled and afraid, we really are very unproductive and unfruitful. Our thinking is unclear; our actions become disjointed; we can't sleep at night; we make unwise decisions.

Now the world gives a peace which settles our troubled and fearful hearts for a time, but the cure is often worse than the disease. There was an army captain who said something like, "We brought peace to the village by destroying it." And the peace the world gives is like that, destructive to body, mind and soul.

Thankfully, the peace Jesus gave to his disciples is for us, too. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you... therefore, do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." Jesus died and rose again to make his peace available for us all. Now sometimes his peace comes to us unexpectedly. Just when our hearts ought to be troubled and afraid, we sense a peace that we can't quite explain. Sometimes Jesus' peace comes to us like that - out-of-the blue. But it can come also as we deliberately turn our focus upon Him. Now Christ does not withhold the gift of his peace from us. But sometimes He wants us to call upon him, to turn to him and ask for his help. So if your heart is troubled and afraid and you have no peace, here's what to do. Turn to Christ and focus on Him. Focus on Christ and the peace he gives will come to your heart.

**First, when your heart is troubled and afraid, focus on Christ's example.**

Sometimes we get so tied up in thinking of Jesus as the divine Saviour, we forget that he is also a human model for us, an example. "My peace I give unto you..." he said. Outwardly Jesus had a troubled, often harried life. Yet inwardly he was at peace. So as we follow his example we can receive the peace that was in Him. Where did Jesus' peace come from?

I think there were three sources. One was worship. Luke chapter 4 tells us that "on the Sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue in Nazareth, as his custom was." No matter what, Jesus found time for worshipping on the Sabbath. And that regular connection with his Heavenly Father, with God's word, and with other worshippers was key to the peace that was in him. It's true for us, too. Someone once wrote in the guest book of a church - "Thanks for the worship and thanks for the peace." I think that among Christians worship is an underused resource. The world out there causes our hearts to become troubled and afraid, but entering into worship brings peace to our hearts. Here in worship our eyes are lifted from our problems into the light and presence of One greater than ourselves. Here we are reminded of who we are - the children of God from whose love we cannot be separated. In this place we hear God's promises. The peace of Jesus comes to us as we do what Jesus himself did - worship.

Another source of Jesus' peace was his practice of prayer. Jesus was often intensely busy but he also took time out to pray. After he heard the troubling news of John the Baptist's execution, Jesus prayed. Even after great miracles, he went off and prayed to be sure that what he was doing was the Father's will. And you recall Him praying in agony in the Garden - "'Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done.'" And there appeared unto him an angel from heaven, strengthening him.....' The secret to Jesus' peace was rooted and grounded in that close prayer connection he had with his Heavenly Father. Again, I think prayer is an underused resource by Christians. I speak personally. There are two things I wish I had been more intentional about - reading Scripture and praying. Oh, I do both, but I wish I had done more of both, much more. I am sure I would have experienced the peace of Christ more often.

And Jesus was at peace because he obeyed God. Trouble and fear comes to our hearts when we are focussed only on ourselves and what we want to do. But Jesus was God-focussed. He came to do God's will not his own. He came to serve others, not to gain their good opinion. So he could sit lightly to human praise and

criticism, those things that often cause us to be troubled and afraid. "Not my will, but thine be done." He trusted and obeyed his Father's will to the very end. And it was that trust and obedience that surely brought peace to his soul. Trusting and obeying God will bring peace to our hearts, as well. It might cause us trouble in the world, but it will calm our hearts.

When your heart is troubled and afraid, focus on Jesus' example. Do what he did and his peace will come to your heart.

**Secondly, when your heart is troubled and afraid, focus on the Cross of Christ.**

Our hearts can be made troubled and afraid by the thought of our past sins, our misguided actions, the wrong we have done even when we knew what was right. This haunts us, because we know that it somehow separates us from God, and has caused hurt to others and to ourselves.

I read that Laura Bush, wife of former President George Bush, recently published her autobiography. Apparently she writes honestly of an incident when as a teenager she carelessly drove through a stop sign hitting another car and killing its driver - a popular student and athlete at her high school. For years Laura Bush felt guilt and remorse and couldn't face the parents of the young man who had died. She kept remembering the sobs of his mother from behind the curtain at the hospital. She didn't attend the funeral, but slept through it at home.

Well, most of us do not have to deal with such an incident from our past. But regrets and sins and wrong-doing can and often do haunt us. I still shudder as I remember the time in Grade 6 that for some bizarre reason I shoved a girl off her bike so that she skinned her knees on the gravel and rode home in tears. Heavens, I can be haunted by the harsh words I spoke to someone last week, or my wrong decisions which brought hurt to someone, including myself. If we are sensitive souls, our hearts are made troubled and afraid by the past. We might try to rationalize it and seek excuses, but in the end we know that we are without excuse, and that we stand guilty before our Holy God.

When your heart is made troubled and afraid because of sin, look to the Cross of Christ. There you will see a man, a sinless man, dying in love for the sins of the world, for your sins and mine. And this was more than a man - this was the very Son of God, sent by the Father to die in our place and to make divine forgiveness available for all. "Father, forgive them," he said. At the Cross God forgives us and repairs the broken relationship between God and ourselves. At the Cross God covers the gap, pays your sin debt and mine and grants new and eternal life to

all who believe. And as Laura Bush discovered, God's forgiveness is the power which enables us to repair the gap between humans who are estranged. It is the power which enables us to forgive ourselves. When your heart is troubled and afraid, focus on the Cross of Christ. Put all of your faith in Him who was crucified and lives forevermore, and his peace will come to you. Paul writes, "Therefore since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..."

**Finally, when your heart is troubled and afraid, focus on Christ's presence.**

Jesus was leaving the disciples physically, but he would not be leaving them alone. John 14:23: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them and we will come to them, and make our home with them." Verse 26, "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my Name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all I have said to you." God would dwell with the disciples. God the Father and Jesus the Son would be with the church by the power of the Holy Spirit. The disciples would never be alone. Jesus said to the disciples, "I will be with you always. I will never fail you or forsake you." And the promise of his presence brought peace to their hearts.

It's true for us who love and trust Christ. His promise is for us, too. God has given the Holy Spirit to comfort, guide, and teach us. God's own presence dwells with us and within us. We are not alone. Ever. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for thou art with me..." When your heart is troubled and afraid, focus on Christ's presence.

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale was a popular preacher whose books on faith and the power of positive thinking still influence many people today. Dr. Peale had a technique he used when counselling people whose hearts were troubled and afraid. First, he let the person tell their story in detail. Then he asked the person to sit in silence for three full minutes and think only of Jesus. Just focus on Him. This allowed people to switch their focus from the problem to the power. No matter what your problem might be, he said, Jesus has the power to help you. And usually, after three minutes of thinking, the person would have an answer to their problem.

Is your heart troubled and afraid? Focus on Christ - his example, his cross, his presence. And the peace that passes all understanding will come and stand guard over your heart and mind. For some of us it may be happening right now. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Therefore, let not your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid."