

“Seek Peace!”

The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA

Psalm 34:11-14 (CEB); Acts 2:37-39

July 23, 2017

I. Intro.

We had a blast at VBS “Hero Central” this past week! Be sure to look around the Welcome Center and the Commons for self-portraits of our super heroes and some of the crafts they made. Every day, Lois Core, Marsha Nolf and Emelia Hickman acted out the daily Bible story and got all the kids to participate.

At the beginning and ending of each day, Captain Shield and his sidekick, Flame, the red panda, introduced the Hero Code for the day and reviewed the Hero Memory verse for the week – with motions!

- God’s heroes have Heart !
- God’s heroes have Courage!
- God’s heroes have Wisdom!
- God’s heroes have Hope!
- God’s heroes have Power!

Memory verse Psalm 34:14 – *“Do good! Seek peace! And Go after it!”*

(Common English Bible paraphrase)

II. Scripture Readings

Psalm 34:11-14 *“Come children, listen to me. Let me teach you how to honor the Lord: Do you love life; do you relish the chance to enjoy good things? Then you must keep your tongue from evil and keep your lips from speaking lies! Turn away from evil! Do good! Seek peace and go after it!”*

Acts 2:37-39 *“When the people heard [Peter’s sermon about the life, death and purpose of Jesus Christ], they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other Apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”*

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

III. Do Good!

All week long we have been saying the VBS memory verse many times a day. “Do good! Seek peace! And Go after it!”

“Do Good” is the easy part, I think. Most of us have the same idea of what is right and what is wrong. People don’t always DO what is right, but they usually recognize when they are doing something wrong.

On Tuesday, several kids lived out the first code, “God’s Heroes have heart,” by helping a child in crafts class. A little boy was having trouble coloring his super-hero self-portrait, and he was trying very hard not to cry. One of the leaders knelt down to ask what was wrong. Then the other children at the table began to help him. The leader drew the eyes and nose, and the children found the colors he wanted. One girl drew the Batman symbol for him. Another drew the smirk. By the time they finished the picture, the boy was happy again. That is Doing Good.

IV. Seek Peace!

Our memory verse also says to “Seek Peace!” What do you imagine when you hear the command to Seek Peace?

My adult step-son gave me a Mother’s Day card about finding peace. There is a picture of basement stairs and two little kids. The boy is yelling, “Momm! We want a snack! Mommm!” his sister says “I sure thought she was doing laundry down here. Oh well...”

Then you notice a drawing of a front-load washing machine. Mom is hiding inside the machine with a book and a cold drink and a smile. The dirty laundry is still in the basket on the floor. Mom is seeking peace.

(Hey kids – the person who drew that card never heard that “God’s Heroes have Wisdom!” Hiding in a machine is dangerous and a dumb thing to do. Don’t you ever do that! Be wise!)

My girlfriend gave me a little plaque that is hanging in my kitchen that says, “My therapist said I would feel better if I finished what I started.” So last week, in my experimental search for Peace, I finished Terri Grantz’s bag of Reese cups, and I finished a box of chocolate thumb-print cookies in the kitchen, and I drank the rest of a liter of Pepsi. I did feel better, although I’m not so sure I felt more peaceful.

V. Where?

Where do you look for peace? I did a Google search on “Where to find Peace.” You won’t believe what popped up first:

“Go to Designer Shoe Warehouse to find a pair of shoes called “Women’s Peace & Love Flat”.

I learned that comedian & author Erma Bombeck said,
“When my kids become wild and unruly, I use a nice safe playpen. When they’re finished, I climb out.”

Susanna Wesley, mother of John and Charles Wesley, had 10 children! When she wanted peace, she would sit in a chair and put her apron over her head. She taught her kids that meant she was praying to God and should not be interrupted.

VI. What?

We all look for peace in different places. But what exactly is it we are searching for?

Peace is usually defined in negative terms. The dictionary definition of Peace is “the absence of war; cessation of violence.” Peace is often defined as freedom from quarrels, freedom from domestic violence or angry yelling. Some people are looking for a peaceful work environment where there is no gossip, no in-fighting, no power struggles or irresponsibility. People are looking for freedom from worry over finances, paying bills, health care.

The Biblical definition of peace is much more positive than the world’s definition.

In the Old Testament, the Jewish word for peace is “Shalom.” Shalom encompassed everything that makes for a person’s highest good; that sense of well-being that comes from knowing that everything is under control of God, who knows what is best.¹ The historic concept of Shalom comes from the memory of the prosperity and well-being that Israel enjoyed during the reign of King Solomon, son of King David. The nation of Israel dwelt in safety, and every man could sit under his own grape vine and his own fig tree. Food was plentiful, people were prosperous, and they had no fear of any enemies attacking them.²

¹ Isaiah 45:17,18

² Harper Study Bible footnote, p. 1037

In the **New Testament**, the Greek word for Peace included three slightly different meanings: peace on earth, peace *with* God, and the peace *of* God.

Peace on earth is what we usually think of, especially at Christmas: people and nations getting along with one another; feelings of restfulness, good relationships, warm fuzzy feelings.

We did see some of that at VBS when the children were sitting on the floor in groups, and a brother and sister would have their arms around each other, listening.

Peace with God is God's gift to humanity, because it is humanly impossible to be perfectly pure and sinless, and to be free from guilt. However, because Jesus died on the cross on our behalf, those who have faith in him are cleansed of their sin, - "The punishment that brought us peace was upon Christ, and by his wounds we are healed."³

We saw peace with God at VBS in the faces of little children, heads bowed and hands folded, praying to God.

The **Peace OF God** is what we are actually longing for. Peace of God can be defined as "inner tranquility in the midst of troubles, trials, persecution, illness or tragedy." You will be disappointed if you are seeking the peace that only covers the absence of tension and stress, because those always come back. The peace of God is a gift, enabling unwavering trust in God and eliminating anxiety and fear.

One of my favorite illustrations is the story of a king who offered a prize for the artist who could paint the best picture of peace. One painting was different from all the rest. Overhead was a stormy sky full of rain and lightning. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. At first glance, the painting did not look peaceful at all. But when the king looked closely, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. There, behind the rush of water, sat a mother bird on her nest – in perfect peace.

The king awarded this painting the prize, for, he said, "peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart."⁴

VII. Who

I believe that in our quest for that kind of unshakeable peace, the answer is not "*what* we are seeking," but rather "*Who* should we be seeking?"

The source of true, lasting peace is in the person of Jesus Christ.

At his birth, Jesus was introduced as the Prince of Peace, the Savior who is Christ the Lord. The angels sang, "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace to those with whom God is pleased."⁵ The peace of which they sang is the peace of mind and soul made possible by the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Jesus' ministry to his disciples lasted only three years. During that time, the disciples witnessed Jesus calm the storm at sea. They were there when he fed 5,000 people with only 5 small loaves and 2 fish. They saw him heal the sick, raise the dead, give sight to the blind and new limbs to the crippled. They heard him teach about the Kingdom of God and tell parables about how to live a life pleasing to God.

³ Isaiah 53:5

⁴ Stories for the Heart, p. 239 "*Picture of Peace*" by Catherine Marshall

⁵ Luke 2:14

On the night before he was crucified, Jesus had a long talk with his disciples. He said to them, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.”*⁶

*“Jesus said, “All this I have spoken while I am with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*⁷

Near the end of that evening, Jesus said, *“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!”*⁸

Your search for true and lasting peace will be fulfilled when you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. He will cleanse you from your mistakes and sins and give you a fresh new start. He promises that all things will, over time, work together for the ultimate good of his people.⁹

Your faith, hope and peace will grow and mature when you come to church every week, joining in worship and participating in classes that will help you understand the Bible and get to know Jesus better. Building friendships with Christians here at church and sharing stories of what God is doing will help to increase your trust in God and your assurance that he keeps his promises.

VIII. How

We have talked about the “Where? What? And Who?” of seeking peace. The last question to ask is “How?”

The answer is found in the second scripture passage we read this morning: Acts 2:37-39.

“When the people heard [Peter’s sermon about the life, death and purpose of Jesus Christ], they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other Apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

The Scriptures promise that the Holy Spirit will direct your path and guide your life. The Holy Spirit will help you learn about Jesus and get to know him as a real living person. The Holy Spirit will gradually transform you to be more and more like Jesus, and to know who God is and what he is like. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, you will be filled with the peace that passes all understanding.

To summarize:

What are you Seeking? – the Peace of God.

In Whom? - Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Where? – By reading the Bible and participating in the life of the church.

How? – Through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Repeat after me! Do Good! Seek Peace! And Go after it! Amen!

⁶ John 14:1

⁷ John 14:25-27

⁸ John 16:33

⁹ Romans 8:28