

**Series: The Journey to the Cross**  
**#4: "The Peace of the Cross"**  
**Ephesians 2:11-18 (NRSV)**  
**By John Gill**

Today we come to the fourth sermon in a series I am preaching on the cross. So far, we've reflected on the way of the cross, the burden of the cross, and the scandal of the cross. Today we'll consider the peace of the cross.

"Peace" – it seems a little out of place. Peace is not a word we usually associate with the cross.

When we hear the word "peace" used in church, it conjures up images of Advent, not Lent. It's easy to think "peaceful" thoughts at Christmastime, when "there's a song in the air, there's a star in the sky, there's a mother's deep prayer, and a baby's soft cry..." Christmas is a TIME of peace, isn't it? Of course! The angels of Bethlehem told us that, didn't they? - "Peace on earth, good will to men," and all that... Yes, when we think of "peace," we automatically think of Christmas.

But you know, it's much harder to feel "peaceful" when, instead of hearing baby's cooing, cattle lowing, and angel's singing, we hear screams of agony and despair as bloody spikes are hammered through the flesh-and-bone of that same baby, as he is impaled on a wooden cross. No, Lent is NOT the time of the year associate with the word "peace." But it should be!

The message of "peace on earth, good will toward men" which was only PROMISED by the angels on that night over the fields of Bethlehem, was finally RATIFIED at the cross of Christ on Calvary's hill, some three decades later.

Did you hear how Paul put it? "Through him, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making PEACE through the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20).

Making peace through such a violent and horrible death – a very odd concept. Hard to imagine – even harder to believe.

But there it is in scripture: God made "peace" through the blood of the cross of Christ. But what does that mean? What is the "peace" that Jesus' death makes possible?

Well, the Bible makes it clear that, thanks to what Christ did on the cross, at least three types of peace are now available to us:

First and foremost, the "peace of the cross" means PEACE WITH GOD.

In Paul's letter to the Romans (5:1-2), he writes about what happens when we have faith in the power of the cross: "Therefore, since we are justified by faith (in the cross), we have peace

with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”

In other words, our ability to receive God’s mercy and grace, AND our hope for eternal life BOTH hinge on our faith in the power of the cross.

Sometimes, when someone is facing death, some well-meaning person will ask them, “Have you made your peace with God?,” and we all know what they mean . . . They mean, “Have you gotten your spiritual house in order?”

But in truth, what they are asking is impossible. None of us can “make peace with God.” Paul is reminding us that it is the other way around – God has already acted in the cross of Christ to “make peace” with US – to reconcile US to him. All WE have to do is accept.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s parents disapproved so strongly of her marriage to her husband, Robert, that they disowned her. Almost weekly, Elizabeth wrote love-letters to her mother and father, asking for a reconciliation. They never once replied.

After ten years of letter-writing, Elizabeth received a huge box in the mail. She opened it. To her dismay and heartbreak, the box contained all of her letters to her parents. NOT ONE of them had ever been opened.

By our sinfulness, WE have “disowned” GOD, and separated ourselves from him. But God longs for a reconciliation with us, so he sent a “love letter” to the world, and signed it with the blood of his Son – and he waits for us to “open that letter” and respond.

That’s why Christ came into the world in the first place – to die on the cross in order to make it possible for us to be at peace with God.

But the “peace of the cross” doesn’t end there. Peace with God makes two other kinds of peace possible. Once we are at peace with God, then we can find PEACE WITH OTHERS.

Paul also wrote about this kind of peace: In Ephesians we read about the animosity between Jews and Gentiles that is overcome by the cross of Christ (2:13-18):

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of two, thus MAKING PEACE, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.”

So, not only did the cross of Christ bring reconciliation between us and God, – it also has torn down the barriers that WE tend to erect to separate ourselves from one another.

That's especially good news for us because ours is a world filled with "walls of hostility." Our families and homes, our nation and our world, - even our beloved United Methodist Church - ALL are in need of this kind of peace which the cross makes possible.

In 1902, a serious boundary dispute threatened to erupt into war between the neighboring countries of Argentina and Chile. The Roman Catholic archbishop of Argentina opposed the military preparations, saying that it was wrong for a Christian land to fight against its brothers in Christ. The bishop of Chile agreed, and together they influenced their governments to call in the mediation of King Edward of Great Britain to settle the dispute.

An agreement was reached, and on the new boundary line, high on a mountaintop, a giant statue of Jesus holding a cross, was erected. Its inscription reads, "Sooner shall these mountains crumble into dust than Argentina and Chile violate the pledge of peace and love they have made at the feet of Christ their Savior."

Christ came to bring reconciliation among all people, and on the cross he tore down the walls of hostility we have put up. Peace with others BEGINS at the cross.

So, the cross makes peace with God, and peace with others possible. But perhaps the most wonderful peace the cross can provide is PEACE WITH OURSELVES.

Inner peace is the hallmark of the Christian life. In his Gospel, John records these words of Jesus: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you" (14:27). And later: "I have said this to you so that, in me, you may have peace" (16:33). Or Paul to the Colossians, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (3:15).

As Herbert Hoover once observed: "Peace is not made at the council tables, or by treaties, but in the hearts of men." Or as Thomas Kempis said: "Be at peace with yourself FIRST, and then you will be able to bring peace to others."

There's a true story about a retired couple a number of years ago who were SO alarmed by the threat of nuclear war that they undertook a serious study of all the inhabited places on the globe. Their goal was to determine where in the world would be the place to be LEAST likely affected by a nuclear war – a place of ultimate peace and security.

They did their research and traveled around the world. Finally, they found their "peaceful place" – in the Falkland Islands! Unfortunately, their "haven of peace" was very soon turned into a war zone by Great Britain and Argentina!

Outer peace is fleeting. Yes, perhaps the most wonderful peace that the cross provides is peace within our own souls!

You see, THIS is the secret to the peace of the cross: We spend our whole lives trying to find peace. But, unless we are at peace in our own hearts, we can never find “true” peace. The only peace that really counts in life is whether we are at peace in our own souls – and the cross of Christ is the only thing that can make that kind of peace possible.

So, when you get right down to it, the question each of us must answer this morning is this: “Do you have this kind of inner peace – this “peace that passes understanding” (as Paul described it to the Philippians)? Or is your soul conflicted and anxious?

If your soul does not know peace (and only you know if it does), maybe the reason is that you have never accepted the power of the cross of Christ in your life. Maybe – just maybe – the reason you don’t have peace with yourself or with others is because you’ve never really made peace with God.

Oh, yes, I know, I know – I said WE can’t “make peace” with God – God makes it for us. That’s true. God HAS made peace between you and him POSSIBLE, but it is not automatic.

The cross makes peace available to us, but WE must claim its power for ourselves. Like those love-letters Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote to her parents, “God’s love letter to you” only can bring you peace – IF you open it.

Have you opened it? Will you?

So, from now on, whenever you hear the word “peace,” don’t just think of the manger – think of the cross – because the baby in the manger came into this world for the sole purpose of making peace through his blood on the cross.

It’s no wonder we call him the “Prince of Peace!”