

“Living the Life: A Peaceful Mind”
Colossians 3:12-17

One of the fruits of living the life God calls us to live is having a peaceful mind. This is not the same thing as having nothing to worry about because our lives are perfect, or our world is perfect. It is about internal state of being. It is about our internal perspective. Sometimes we get stuck believing that we are doomed to just have an internal state of worry or tension all the time (with a few respites) and that there is nothing we can do to change it. We think that we are simply responding to the events of our lives. But it all depends on the lens from which we look at life. Expanding our perspective can be a tremendous help for us to get beyond the narrow confines of our egos, repetitive thoughts, and fears. Scientist Neil deGrasse Tyson tries to do that with science. In his show *Cosmos*, he talks about the cosmic calendar and how we are just at the beginning of it. Tyson explains that Jan. 1 would mark the Big Bang and the present falls on midnight on Dec. 31. At this scale, every day represents nearly 40 million years and humans only evolved in the last hour of New Year's Eve. Jesus would have been born five seconds ago, according to this calendar. Here is a clip of his explanation of this calendar. <https://youtu.be/DzgAMNz676c>

When you take this view of life, the world, and the universe, you can't help but get a different perspective, a much larger one! The Apostle Paul was trying a similar thing with the Colossians. He was trying to help them connect with a deeper and more expansive way of life than that of the culture around them. Their perspective was limited by their culture. The city of Colossae was located on the southern banks of the river Lycus in Phrygia in southeast Asia Minor which is modern day Turkey (map of Colossae and an image).

The city was insignificant in its size and location, even though it had formerly been large and important, much like Batavia, which was the birthplace of Western New York. There were two neighboring cities that upstaged Colossae: Laodicea, ten miles away, and Hierapolis, sixteen miles away. These were the happening places. These were the cities that had it going. If you wanted to buy some high-end commodities or watch a nice show, you had to travel a few miles. Even when Colossae was almost completely destroyed by an earthquake around the year 60 CE, it was not rebuilt for several years. It was not really missed by many people.

But something significant was happening among the followers of Jesus in Colossae. This was a new church community that was established through the teachings of Epaphras. Even though the writer of the letter was giving thanks for the faith of the community and their generosity, there was an underlying issue at work. Some biblical scholars assert that the Colossian Christians were being pressured to follow the teachings and practices of the imperial cult around them. They wanted to be cool like the big cities of Laodicea, Hierapolis, and even Rome. They were tempted to think that the philosophies and spiritual practices of the big Roman temples were more effective than theirs. They wanted to be like the sophisticated people of the bigger cities! So, the letter comes to warn them about the dangers of succumbing to such pressures. It is not that the big cities were bad. They also had followers of Jesus in those larger and more

important cities. The threat to the faithfulness of the church in Colossae was the influence of the imperial cult philosophy which glorified the emperor as the son of God and the savior of the world (Image of emperor as the son of God).

The Romans believed that they were a benign empire that brought peace and civility to all. They believed that violence and the oppression of some minorities were just means to a good end. But the letter to the Colossians warned the Christians there that there was a huge difference between the way of the emperor and the way of Christ.

In today's text, Paul was calling on the Colossians to change their perspective from allowing their external circumstance to define their sense of mission and purpose in life. The world around them was full of negative messages about their status and significance. But Paul was calling them to a better way to live. A couple of things that I want to point out in today's text. Paul does not tell them to change their minds because Christ's perspective is not always gained through head knowledge. Instead he tells them two things. First, they needed to clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. These were the things they should aim for in daily life. Second, they needed to let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts. In the original language of the text, the Greek, the term "rule" in Greek is a sports metaphor of "be a referee." Paul was telling them to have "the peace of Christ" as the referee of your heart, that is, Christ's peace must be the "sports official" who has final authority in the actions you take in the game of life in which you are playing! This is your final authority in life. In order to live the life Christ calls us to live we have to abandon the judgements and pressures of the culture and to let the peace of Christ be our guide. Peace in the Bible is a very active thing. It is not just a feeling of peace or the absence of conflict. It is about seeking the wellbeing of the world around us. Peace in the Bible is about the wholeness of the world as God intends it to be.

So, if you are hoping to have a peaceful mind, you must be willing to listen to the wisdom of Christ which is deep in your heart. Christ's wisdom and peace are the final authorities in life on gaining the perspective we need to have a peaceful mind. The culture around us promises us peace through power, esteem, and security. But in Christ, we know that none of these things ultimately can bring us that peace that passes all understanding. The peace which is promised to us if we get the right job, the right spouse, the right circumstances, the right whatever, is illusive and can never be attained, at least not for any length of time. But what Jesus shows us is that peace could only come when we are aligned with God's purpose of peace in our hearts and in our world.

This week I saw two jarring images from Syria that renewed my resolve to continue to align my life with the peace of Christ and to let that peace rule in my heart and to help others know and work for that peace in our world. The first one is from a guy selling fruit on a cart with the background of rubble behind him.



The second image is that of a little girl trying to shield her doll's eyes from the violence she was witnessing. Both images reminded me of how critical it is for us to work for peace. This peace is not about having our sense of comfort. It is about the work of having the world be transformed into God's vision of peace and wholeness.



Normally, the sermon leads you to a few insights based on the scripture, but today, I would like us to engage this scripture for ourselves and from our own experience. In groups of three or four, look at the scripture on the announcement sheet that you received and see what you come up with and let us share it with one another. How might the peace of Christ become a reality in our daily life? How would we learn to trust this referee of the heart when the world around us is in chaos or we are feeling that chaos in our own minds? How might we allow Christ to help us with this so that we can be Christ's agents of peace in the world?

(allow time for discussing and then big group sharing).

Two things that I would like to highlight for us from the text. First, we need each other. We need to share and reflect on the faith with one another, just like you did right now. We need to worship, serve, grow, and connect with each other. That is how we support each other on the journey. Second, a Lenten practice that we are invited to do this week is to take one day this week to skip lunch and go somewhere to spend the time to talk to Jesus or to pray by walking or sitting in quiet. Make this a priority. Put it on your calendar as an important event with God. Don't wait until the week unfolds and then try to fit it in. We will end with reading Colossians 3:12-15 twice. Amen.