

“WITH...peace”

Scripture: Romans 12:14-21

Graphics: Stones, hands, togetherness

Big Truth: The people of the Panama UMC are called to live out their salvation with a set of characteristics that accompany the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Focus Phrase: We live WITH PEACE when we allow Jesus to love the world around us through us.

1. Introduction

- A. Thank you to Sam for preaching and helping lead in worship last week as we were on vacation, helping our daughter Abby and son-in-law Andrew move to a new apartment. It's good to be back, honestly...moving isn't easy!
- B. Let's pray as we dive into God's holy word today... **PRAY!!!**
- C. This morning, we're back into our series of messages from Romans 12 and 13 called WITH. W-I-T-H. WITH.
- D. (stones) Like well-worn stones found in a riverbed that we can hold in our hands, Paul gives the church in Rome five characteristics that were to be growing in their lives as followers of Jesus.
- E. In week one of our series, Paul appealed to the church to live out their faith WITH HUMILITY. We were challenged to live between false pride and false humility, as we presented our bodies in worship to God and service to others. How'd that go for you? Humility isn't always easy to find. If you missed that, you can go back and catch that first message on our Livestream page.
- F. The other four stones, or characteristics, that Paul calls us to have WITH us are: peace, respect, love, and honor. Today, we turn our attention to peace - to living out our faith WITH PEACE.
- G. So many times, when we hear or think about the word **peace**, we think of one of two things: we either think of an absence of war ...the end of conflict, OR we think of sitting by a mountain lake, experiencing peace and quiet.
- H. Now, both of those things are **parts** of what the bible offers up for peace. But the concept of peace in the bible is so much more. I would even go as far to say that the ideas of peace that we experience are OUTCOMES of true peace that comes when we live our lives WITH PEACE from a biblical perspective.
- I. You may have heard a simple turn-of-a-phrase that goes like this: **No Jesus, no Peace. Know Jesus, know peace.**
- J. The point to this phrase is simply that if you know who Jesus is, personally, then you have peace available to you. If you don't know Jesus, then you can't know peace.

- K. Now, that phrase has some truth to it, but I would argue that there's more to knowing peace than just knowing Jesus...AND, maybe more importantly, those who don't know Jesus can, indeed, know peace. But for those who don't know Jesus, peace is not from within them, as it is for those who KNOW Jesus. The only way for those who don't know Jesus to experience peace is for it to come from the Jesus followers who are actively working in the world to be peaceful, offer peace, and grow in peace. Jesus said in Matthew 5: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."
- L. Obviously, living out our faith WITH peace goes far beyond simply experiencing a lack of war or internal calm.
- M. The section of scripture we'll read this morning **pivots on peace**. But it's not inwardly-focused peace. In fact, this whole section today is Paul's appeal to the church in Rome, somewhere around AD50, to foster peace WITH THE WORLD AROUND THEM.
- N. Right now, and way back in the first century, the church is often at odds with the culture around it. The church often finds itself at odds with politics, with culture, with people who oppose or are apathetic about the church, about Jesus, and about faith. This is nothing new.
- O. But, the church is clearly called to not only experience peace WITHIN, but to work really hard and thoughtfully to create peace in our families, in our community, and in our world. We are called to share the gospel of Jesus WITH PEACE.
- P. Let's turn to Romans 12, starting in verse 14 to see how Paul is encouraging the church to do that...

2. Scripture

A. READ ROMANS 12:14-16

- i. This section all started in verse 9, as Paul wrote, "Let love be genuine..." Love is the basis for everything we do...and it's the engine that drives the church. You've heard me say this before, I hope: loving starts with seeing the other person...and then seeing their needs.
- ii. In verse 9-13, Paul was exhorting the church to meet needs...to meet needs in the church and for those who might come into the church.
- iii. But when he gets to verse 14, he turns the church's attention to those who are clearly **outside the church**. He's talking TO the church and how they are to live WITH PEACE to those around them, who haven't yet come to faith in Jesus.
- iv. And, if you track any of the trends in our world today, those who claim to be actively Christian - those to whom these things Paul talks about would

be important concepts - that number is **shrinking** in our country. We now, like in Paul's day, live in a culture that's a mission field far more than a Christian nation.

- v. So, in order to offer peace, Paul tells the church in Rome to:
 - a. Bless those who persecute them - bless! Don't curse.
 - b. Rejoice with those who rejoice.
 - c. Weep with those who weep.
 - d. Live in harmony with one another - don't be haughty (or stuck up), associate with the lowly and don't claim to be wiser than you are.
- vi. Now, remember that Paul is writing TO the church which is IN the world but not OF the world, and encouraging them to do THESE things WITH the world to build God's peace.
- vii. And that PEACE is all about doing and saying the things that Jesus did and said. In Matthew 5:38-48, we have Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. In that sermon, Jesus said a whole bunch of preposterous things like: "Love you enemy." "Offer your other cheek to someone who strikes your first one." "If someone sues you for your shirt, give them your coat too." Preposterous!
- viii. But that's the ethic of Jesus! That's the ethic of Paul! This is how the church is to act - it's radically counter-cultural and sometimes makes little sense had it not been for the fact that Jesus lived it out.
- ix. So bless those who persecute you. Now, we aren't aware of any specific persecution that was happening in the church in Rome, but Paul knew it would come...for them and even for the church today.
- x. Paul then writes - rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. At first, this seems easy. But, remember, Paul is writing TO the church ABOUT those OUTSIDE the church.
- xi. Building peace - living out faith WITH peace - means going down the street, across town, or wherever the church finds itself, and celebrating with those who celebrate. I've officiated enough weddings to be very good at celebrating with people who I'm pretty sure would never darken the door of a church and who are not believers in Jesus. BUT, in that moment, celebrating a wedding, or a new baby, or a promotion, builds relationship and offers peace by connecting people together with the Jesus in me.
- xii. Paul says that if followers of Jesus neglect to walk down the street to the block party with neighbors or go to the wedding of that family that you know parties too much, then we won't be able to be Jesus in their midst.

- xiii. The caution is obvious, though, that we need to actually let Jesus shine through when we go.
- xiv. Same with those who weep. Paul says the church has to care - with holy empathy - for those who lose loved ones, or experience loss of job or home. The church's weeping with them is a statement about what PEACE looks like...and, again, the church goes with Jesus when it goes.
- xv. Also, don't be haughty, Paul wrote - acting like the church is better than.
- xvi. Don't be afraid to associate with the lowly. The Greek here actually means that Christians should **not be afraid of menial tasks or jobs**. Get your hands dirty with those who are getting their hands dirty.
- xvii. And, from last week's playbook, be humble, with sober judgment, without inflating your worth while using the gifts you've been given.
- xviii. We live WITH PEACE when we allow Jesus to love the world around us through us.
- xix. Let's look at verse 17...

B. READ ROMANS 12:17-21

- i. Here, again, Paul is telling the church to **be counter-cultural**. Don't do what you want or what you think you should...do what Jesus did!
- ii. You may want to repay evil with evil - which seems to be the way the world works. It was the same way in the first century. But, back to Jesus' words, this time from Luke 6:35 "...love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked."
- iii. Paul was saying, "Don't just react by lashing out...think it through and do the noble (i.e., the right) thing." You've heard me say this before, but the Christian life is pretty easy. ***Always do the next right thing.***
- iv. It's interesting that Paul says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."
 - a. Look, Paul's not naive. He knows that living out our faith WITH PEACE isn't always possible. Not everyone will invite you to the party. In fact, they may NOT invite you because you smell too much like Jesus.
 - b. And sometimes, the Holy Spirit gives us clear instructions to steer clear of this or that person or place. That's fair.
 - c. But WHEN YOU CAN, Paul says, as far as it is within your power and influence, live WITH PEACE as you engage the outside world.

- d. In Hebrew, the concept of peace is known as shalom, which is a wholeness that comes when the connections people have with God and with each other are based on love and being in right relationship.
- e. In Greek, which Paul uses in our passage today, peace is eirēneūō (from the root word eirēnē, “peace”). It’s defined as living in the condition of God’s peace (gift of wholeness, integrity of being).
- f. As far as it depends on you, church, live into God’s peace, God’s wholeness and integrity, by being in right relationship with God AND (AND!) with each other...everyone, especially those OUTSIDE the church, as counter-cultural as that seems.
- v. He goes on to say: Don’t take revenge. Let God take care of that. Deut. 32:35
- vi. In fact, Paul says, feed your enemy if they’re hungry. Give your enemy something to drink, if they’re thirsty. This phrase comes from Proverbs 25:21-22.
- vii. By doing that, you’ll heap burning coals on their heads. At first that may seem like torture or something. It’s actually in the same vein as feeding and watering your enemy. Giving someone burning coals was an act of hospitality, actually, according to most scholars. It’s like, “Here’s some fire for you to use at your house.”
- viii. When the church is offering food and drink to enemies, and offering hospitality to strangers, people won’t know what to do with it AND it MAY just give them reason to pause and wonder what these Jesus people are up to. When they happens, the Holy Spirit is like, “YES!”
- ix. Evil is overcome with good...and we, as a church, as not overcome with evil that surrounds us in the world.

3. Application

- A. We live WITH PEACE when we allow Jesus to radically and counter-culturally love the world around us through us.
- B. But what are some practical application points for us this morning? It’s one thing to think through the concept of engaging the non-church world in your life? It’s another thing to consistently join Jesus in engaging the world with the purpose of building a world WITH peace.
- C. Paul gives us three things...well, four actually.
 - i. The first one is to **allow Jesus to give you peace**. I’ve heard testimonies from people during this COVID pause that they needed to re-center on Christ because so much that was swirling around was a tornado of anxiety

and fear. Peace came when they began to pray, and just be still. So, start this week with asking God for peace.

- ii. Then, living out your faith WITH peace starts and ends with love. **Let love lead the way to peace.**
 - a. Paul said in verse 9, let love be genuine. The Greek word for genuine has the sense of being **un-hypocritical**.
 - b. If your heart is broken for those around you that YOU know, but that don't yet know Jesus, then love will lead you to keep building relationship for the express purpose of offering the peace of Jesus to them.
 - c. Be un-hypocritical about who you love and why. Be genuine about not judging those who aren't yet following Jesus...they aren't bound to the same rules you are.
 - d. Go to that block party. But go as an agent of Jesus and let them experience the peace in your life.
 - e. Go to that wedding. But go as an agent of Jesus who stands on the truth but loves boldly, and let them experience peace as they celebrate, no matter who's getting married.
 - f. Go weep with someone who is weeping this week. Maybe that's a conversation on social media or a phone call to a person that a widow who is isolated.
- iii. Third, **be counter-cultural**.
 - a. In many ways, just by being a follower of Jesus, you ARE already counter-cultural. If you can't tell the difference between you and the larger culture, then press into Jesus a little more.
 - b. Do things like Paul says, "Never avenge yourself. Let God do that."
 - c. "Feed your enemies. Give drinks to your enemies." Maybe start with the family members who you're estranged from. Forgive someone that you need to forgive. Be humble and patient. Maybe a name is in mind.
 - d. Jesus was about as counter-cultural as it gets. Paul was a close second. Follow their lead and live in peace by enjoying making people think you're weird in a great way!
- iv. And, lastly, **never stop growing in peace**.
 - a. "Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good."
 - b. Working out during COVID, Stacy and I have new muscles we didn't have before. For 3 months, we've noticed a difference, not in weight, really, but in muscle. We're stronger today because we've been growing in our use of our muscles.

- c. Growing in peace starts with not allowing evil to overcome you...and it has the goal of overcoming all forms of evil with good.
- d. And just like muscles, peace grows when you practice being peaceful and bringing the peace of Jesus to others.
- e. Find 1 or 2 ways this week to bring peace to someone. One great way to do that is to listen. Just listen before you speak or jump to a conclusion about something or someone.
- v. When you find peace as the Holy Spirit works within in, love well, swim against the cultural stream, and practice peace, then your faith life will be lived WITH PEACE.

4. Conclusion

- A. No Jesus, no peace. Know Jesus, know peace. This so often is pointed at the world around us as a backhanded attempt at evangelism.
- B. But what if this phrase is actually pointed at you and me...and the church. That if we don't truly know this Jesus, that we, indeed, cannot know how to offer peace to the world. Yet, if we DO know Jesus and what he wants from us, that the world around us, even though they don't know Jesus, might know the peace of Jesus through us.
- C. We live WITH PEACE when we allow Jesus to love the world around us through us.
- D. Like a well-worn stone, solid and smooth, peace becomes not just something that is in YOU, but ultimately something you share with the world...we share together with the world.
- E. WITH...peace.
- F. Let's pray!