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Osler Mennonite Church

Fruit of the Spirit: Peace
Isaiah 32:16-20 & Matthew 11:28-30

Good Morning,

This mornings Fruit of the Spirit is Peace, a concept the Mennonite community holds firmly in its definition of discipleship. The Mennonite conviction and interpretation of peace is one of the many reasons I was drawn to the Mennonite faith. There is a deep understanding of the intrinsic relationship between peace and justice, I don't know if I've ever made it more than six months in the Mennonite community without being reminded of the definition of Shalom. The call heard in our Isaiah text to understand that there is no peace without justice is echoed throughout the peacemaking tradition of this faith, from MCC work to political activism, to fights for equal rights and equitable treatment. Our understanding of faithfulness causes us to respond to verse 17 **“It is justice that will bring us peace – only justice will produce quietness and lasting security.”** With one big AMEN.

So I'm not going to talk to you about that kind of peace, or at least not yet. Instead your going to have to sit through a sermon on hippy-dippy inner peace. Don't walk out.

This summer at Shekinah the bible theme was the Armour of God. One of the lessons was on the shoes of peace, **“for your shoes put on your feet whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.”** We talked about how shoes come in a pair of two, we need to keep in mind two different aspects of peace – outer peace and inner peace. This verse from Ephesians set us up well because it emphasises that we are to equip ourselves with whatever we need to go out. The particulars are left up to us. I believe that not only is the work of peace and justice in this world dependant on a foundation of self-care but that our own inner peace is actually desired by God. That us being at peace or practicing disciplines that bring us peace is good in and of itself.

Sometimes the call to fight for justice is relentless and exhausting. The pressure to do good, to help, and to give of ourselves leads to a sacrifice that compromises our own wellbeing in the process. It feels easy to accept the truth that we cannot be at peace if those around us are not also at peace, but it is harder to know the truth of the flipped concept. That those around us cannot have peace if we are not also at peace. That peace for the world includes peace in our own being.

We love to be the helpers and the servants, and this is good. It is challenging, and even seems contradictory to our Martyred history to live from the belief that God values our peace and our well-being. **“Come to me, all you who labor and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart. Here you will find rest for your soul, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”** This gospel truth is challenging to reconcile with my experience of peace-work.

The conversations around burnout and compassion fatigue in ‘helper’ professions are extremely high, people who are fighting for the betterment of others are worn out. The burden does not feel light and the work of activism or even just active listening is not easy. But if both of our scripture texts are taken today as holding truth and insight into God’s peace then there must be a way for outer peace and inner peace to be linked rather than at odds with each other. April Yamasaki in her book *Sacred Pauses* talks about a vision of peace work that is dependant on working on our own peace as well. That if we are “convicted of our own responsibility to live in ways that make for peace” while trusting in God’s promise of rest, then we need to start cultivating practices that give us “sacred pauses” prioritising renewal every day instead of waiting for a future time to shed our weariness. Creating for ourselves habits of peace as a part of our peacemaking.

A few years ago my mom forwarded me a chain e-mail entitled “Thimble Lists.” It talked about how so much focus is put on ‘bucket-list’ ideas, this big once in a life time experiences like sky-diving, or writing a novel, or visiting all 7 continents. And while dreaming big is beautiful, it tends to erase our focus on the tiny wonders of the everyday. So this e-mail was encouraging people to write thimble lists. To take time to pause and write a list of the pieces of life that bring peace and contentment and hope that we are able to seek out or just take note of in our everyday lives. It included things like:

- Savouring a bowl of strawberries
- Enjoying the sound of someone else’s laughter
- Feeling the wind on your face.

I’ve heard of similar lists used as tools for sobriety or taking care of our mental health. Taking time to sit with ourselves, and ask what it would mean for us to grow not to just be instruments *for* peace but instruments *of* peace. To allow this fruit of the spirit to actually shape *us* not just what we do. I believe making this kind of list, taking the time to sit with ourselves and reflect on who we are and what our particular manifestation of peace looks like is an act of faithfulness. I believe this for two reasons

1. I believe that you are a child of God, and that you were created to experience Gods peace. I believe that as much as God desires peace for this world God desires peace for you, without your peace the world cannot experience Shalom.
2. I believe that without being peace, we cannot do anything for peace. When I exist without peace in my life, it is not only me who is affected. My lack of peace affects those around me. It is not just the individual who profits from inner peace, but for all those connected to the individual.

Because of these convictions, I'm going to lead us in an act of peacemaking here in our service. In your bulletin today is a blank yellow sheet of paper. This is to become your thimble list. If you are sharing a bulletin with someone then feel free to rip this paper in half (that's why we left such a big sheet). Matt has kindly distributed pencils and pencil crayons throughout the pews but you may need to share those too. We are going to make our own thimble lists as an act of prayer and a will to live into God's peace for this world.

The things you write down can be as creative and imaginative and as mundane and ordinary as you can think of. This list is as uniquely personal as God's call in your life. I have a singing bowl up here with me. I am going to lead us in a breath, sound the bowl three times and then give you space to write. To write out the things that give you peace the little sacred pauses that either are or could be. I will sound the bowl again at the end of our reflection time and lead us in breathing once more.

The reason we are doing this in church is because I think self-care at its best is a sacred act of thanksgiving and trust. It is worship because it is caring for the creation and beloved children of God. If this is the first time you've had to sit down and think about this and your paper is blank that's fine. The act of breathing in and out and sitting with the intention of seeking peace is good, this in itself is peace-work.

My hope is that you will keep this list in your hearts or on your desk. That you can return to them and find a daily practice with them. If we want to participate in the pursuit of peace for all we need to remember the peace for us – remember that we are a part of the all. Jesus proclaims a justice and peace in a world whose brokenness shows us only a system of violence, of burn-out and sacrifice that doesn't honor ourselves as God's creation.

Believing in the way of peace, means trusting that the way of justice is something other than the worship of the idol of efficiency & either/or. As peacemakers we are committed to finding a third option – it isn't either they get peace or I get peace. It has to be both. Choosing peace for others at the expense of peace for us is still buying into the myth that there is not enough peace to go around. It still falls short.

There is no peace for me if the people I love do not have peace. And there is no peace for the people I love if I do not have peace. It is not selfish to seek peace for you. In doing so you are seeking peace for a child of God. Listen to God's will for us in Isaiah **“My people will abide in a peaceful environment, with secure dwellings, quiet places for rest.”**

This is not meant to be one more thing on your to do list. That's why we did it here today, we have been given the blessing, the permission, the gift of having peace for ourselves and the duty and responsibility to know that peace for ourselves includes seeking peace for others. There will never be a clear cut between outer and inner peace, that's where the shoe metaphor falls short. It's not really about two separate kinds of peace, but understanding that your peace is bound up with mine. It is believing that there is going to be enough peace to go around, and living into that belief in all we do. To allow God to transform our current models of peace work to better live into the seeking of Shalom.

Peace be with you. Amen.