The Fruit of the Spirit: “Peace”

We’re on the third part of a series of “The Fruit of the Spirit.” Today we come to the fruit of “peace.” Paul writes,

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience,
kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

Peace. It’s a complicated issue. Can there be peace with North Korea? What about on our borders? With Russia? How could there ever be peace with terrorists? Could there be peace among Israelis and Palestinians; Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and all the rest? The world is in some serious need of peace. And that’s not new. For as long as there has been time, there has been a need for peace.

We just celebrated our independence as a nation. To acquire that freedom there was first conflict and war. Lives were lost and families were broken. It was not a July 4th picnic, or a time of peace. It was war. So, it was with the Civil War, and with every other war. Some ditches are worth dying in. Things matter. How is peace to come?

And think of the peace that is needed just within the United States today; racial prejudice, discrimination, hate, abuse, violence, economic injustice, and the current political war between Democrats and Republicans.

And what about Ruya Kadir? She was the 3-year-old little girl who was stabbed, and died on her birthday in Boise, Idaho last week. The family came here to get away from violence in Ethiopia. How do they have peace? And what about the man who did it? Can he ever have peace? Should he ever have peace? How would you start to bring peace to all these complex and entrenched issues? It’s overwhelming.

But it’s closer than that. What about the need for peace in our homes and among our families? Marriages that fail, estranged siblings, child and spousal abuse, affairs,
addictions; wounds too deep to heal and forgiveness too shallow to make a difference. How in the world do you bring peace to all that? Maybe we don’t.

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Paul wrote to the Philippians,  
*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* (Phil. 4:7)

The peace of God. What is that? It “surpasses all understanding.”

My mother and I used to have arguments when I was younger. It was the same argument. She would tell me to do something and I would ask, “Why?” Same response; “Because I said so!” To which I would respond, “But why?” Same response, “Just do what I tell you to do!”

I learned right there and then that there would be things in life I would never understand. (My mother being one of them!) You can’t control everything. There are things that make no sense. Something, or somebody is at work in this world, and they are bigger than you! It is beyond us.

There is a peace that prevails even in the midst of life’s greatest storms, and even amongst our strongest differences. That peace is a gift from God, a fruit of the Holy Spirit within us. It is actually God’s peace that dwells in us. It’s not our peace! It “cannot be manufactured, or humanly produced.” (The New Interpreter’s Bible: vol. XI, Richard Hayes, “Galatians,” p. 328). We don’t have to understand it, we need to receive it.

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Our lives are the environment in which the fruit of the Spirit is cultivated. Fruit can grow and flourish, or it can be eaten by bugs! Fruit can wither on the vine. Fruit can dry up without water and proper conditions.

So, the fruit is born into our lives by the Holy Spirit, but there are conditions within our lives that can be a hindrance to the Spirit’s life within us. We can choke it out. It can dry up. We can leave it unattended. Peace is like that. It may be a gift from God, but it needs to be cultivated by us.

Mark Gornik writes;  
*While always a gift of grace, peace will not come about…unless the church works at it intentionally and more tenaciously than the forces…against it.*
The fruit of the Spirit has to be fed and nourished. It takes hard work. Because it is a gift does not mean it comes in and takes over your life and fixes everything. We’re in cahoots with God. We’re partners. We work together in a relationship. We can cultivate this stuff, or we can let it die. We can work hard at it, or we can just sit back and hope grace covers our mess.

The needs for peace are God-sized issues that require a God-sized response. If we could manufacture peace, we would have already done it. It’s not a matter of intelligence, it is a matter of will. Peace comes by aligning our will with God’s will. But that doesn’t mean there is no cost or conflict.

Whatever peace is, it cannot be acting as if something doesn’t matter when it does. It can’t mean letting go of your ethics and morals in order to reduce the conflict. Peace can’t mean being a doormat and lying down while others have their way. It cannot mean standing by and tolerating injustice for the sake of peace. That’s not peace.

Peace is not the absence of conflict. We have a magnet on our refrigerator that reads;

*Peace – it does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart.* (unknown)

Jesus likely had peace on the cross, while he suffocated to death. How could that be? The world was in turmoil. The Messiah had been rejected. All would seem to be lost. It was a dark day. Can there be peace in a place like that?

There are times when we are at odds with others because we are hanging onto our values, or they are hanging onto theirs. There is conflict in those places. We disagree. We’re on opposite sides. Wars are fought. Thousands die. Martyrs sacrifice their lives for a cause. So how does the fruit of peace manifest itself in those times and in those places?

We need a peace “which surpasses all understanding.”

There may be some difficult days ahead for you, or for me. Our nation may yet see some difficult days. The world already has some difficult days in it. But the fruit of God’s Spirit dwells richly within you and gives you a peace that “surpasses all understanding.” That’s not naiveté. It’s not denial, or over-simplistic faith. It’s peace.
Where did it come from, and how could it be there in the midst of all the conflict, violence, and pain? It belongs to God! It’s not yours, but it dwells in you when your mind and heart are open to receive the gifts of God’s Spirit.

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Let us pray;

* Lord, we are bold to pray for Your peace this morning. Empower us to surrender our lives as a place where that peace can grow and flourish. Guide us to cultivate this peace, that it might be manifested in our lives; in how we talk, in the decisions we make, in the way we relate to others. Help us to be a witness to You at work, at home, in our politics, and in our relationships with one another. In your mercy, grant us, and all your people, your peace.

* In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Congregation; Amen.