



PEACE & GLOBAL WITNESS
SPECIAL OFFERINGS
PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION

Peace at All Times

A Sermon by The Rev. Dr. John A. Dalles
Psalm 26:1-12; II Thessalonians 3:16

*“Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace
At all times in all ways.
The Lord be with you all.”
- II Thessalonians 3:16*

When I read this particular verse in II Thessalonians, it makes me think of another sentence which is famous—or perhaps infamous is the better term. I think of the year 1938. The month of September. I think of a newsreel showing an airport. In the rain. I think of the man who was then Prime Minister of England, carrying a rolled umbrella, descending the stairs from an airplane, back from a conference in Berlin, with a statement in his hand that he waved to the crowd. The following is the wording of the statement that Neville Chamberlain waved when he stepped off the plane after the conference in Berlin had ended on 30 September 1939:

“We, the German Fuehrer and Chancellor, and the British Prime Minister, have had a further meeting today and are agreed in recognizing that the question of Anglo-German relations is of the first importance for two countries and for Europe.

“We regard the agreement signed last night and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.

“We are resolved that the method of consultation shall be the method adopted to deal with any other questions that may concern our two countries, and we are determined to continue our efforts to remove possible sources of difference, and thus to contribute to assure the peace of Europe.”

Chamberlain read this statement to a cheering crowd in front of 10 Downing St. and then he said: “My good friends this is the second time in our history that there has come back from Germany to Downing Street peace with honor. I believe it is peace in our time.”

What a contrast that image is with what came next. Eleven months later, the Third Reich invaded Poland and the Second World War was underway. What a contrast: *“Peace in our Time” and The Second World War.* And what a contrast that is with the words of Paul to the Thessalonians. *“Peace in our time...”* It was a lovely pipe dream, in September 1938. *“Peace at all times in all ways.”* Is it just a lovely pipe dream, in 2018? Or is it something more? And if so, what?

Christians Face Conflict in the World

The first question that springs to mind is this: “Did Paul understand what the followers of Jesus Christ face in the world?” On the surface it seems as if Paul was out to lunch. It seems that Paul misunderstood the strife and conflict that are everywhere around us. But that would be incorrect. We know that because Paul speaks elsewhere of his own involvement in many kinds of conflict and its consequences. We read about the challenges that conflict brought his way. So we know that Paul knew that Christians have to deal with conflict all the time. The kinds of conflict range from interpersonal strife to global tensions. The faces of those at the center of these conflicts have changed, and the names have changed, but the fact of the conflict has persisted down the centuries. There is conflict in the world now. And there was conflict in Paul’s world, then.

He was writing to Jesus’ people in Thessalonica. This was a city on the Gulf of Salonika. It was first called Therme, because of its hot springs, but it was renamed for the daughter of Alexander the Great. It was the capital of one-third of Macedonia. It was a military and commercial hub. Biblical scholars believe that Paul wrote this second letter to the Thessalonians in about the year 52 AD. The congregation of Christ’s followers in Thessalonica was undergoing struggles. There were persecutions from others. There was conflicted teaching about the end times from within. They also had their own internal soul-searching going on. They were wracked with concern that they were not good enough for God; that they might not be able to stand up against the challenges that would come their way. Instead of agreeing with them, in their negative attitude toward themselves, Paul wrote to point out their strong points and their abilities, so that these rather timid disciples of Jesus would have a new level of confidence.

As if Paul is encouraging them to say, “We think we can, we think we can, we know we can—with the help of Christ.” Who better than Paul to encourage them, considering all of the hardship and conflict that God had seen him through. The Apostle is building them up, so that they, in turn, may bring glory to God. He ends his letter with a prayer for their peace, all the time and everywhere.

Knowing that they were in the middle of external and internal strife, how could Paul point them in the direction of “Peace at all times and in every way”?

Peace at All Times

When Paul speaks of peace, the Greek word he uses corresponds very closely with the Hebrew word “Shalom”. “Shalom” is a word the Hebrews used as a welcome greeting and as a farewell blessing. When they said “Shalom” they wished one another a state of being whole, well and content. So, too, when an early Christian like Paul wished other Christians “Peace.” In a Christian sense, when we bid one another “Peace”, it is a shorthand benediction. We are actually wishing one another: The fullness of Jesus Christ, the abundance of Jesus Christ, and the contentment that comes only from Jesus Christ.

Imagine that you are part of a congregation that is beset from the outside by forces that want to stop what you believe about Jesus and the emerging kingdom of God. On top of that, imagine that you are also having self-doubts. Now, imagine what it would mean to you, to hear someone whom you admire as a leader of the Church wish you the Christ-given “peace”: fullness, abundance and contentment – just think how good that would feel.

“Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace

At all times in all ways.

The Lord be with you all.”

- II Thessalonians 3:16

Isn’t that wonderful? Now, let’s take it one step further. Let’s look at what Paul means by the word that is translated into English as “in all times”. The meaning of “in all

times,” in Greek, is the word “continually.” So, the Peace Paul offers is the fullness of Christ, continually; the abundance of Christ, perpetually; and the contentment that comes only from the living Lord, sustained, and without ceasing. In times of strife or difficulty, this continual state of peace would be a wonderful resource—to get believers through whatever might come our way. That kind of peace might be more than enough. But there is even more. Paul also bids us this kind of peace “in all ways”.

Peace in All Ways

The Greek meaning of the phrase “in all ways” indicates peace “in every aspect of life.” Omnipresent. Ubiquitous. Always there. You might say: Peace is a Christian’s “secret weapon” in a violent world. Paul is calling Christians to draw upon this secret weapon—the hidden assets of peace, to deal with any kind of conflict.

Some may wonder whether the advice of a person two millennia removed from today’s conflicts has the kind of potential to bring peace where there is conflict. Nowhere does Paul say that will be easy. This kind of peace is hard-won. But who can turn their back upon the prospect of peace as it is offered to us in the name of the One who is the Prince of Peace. Who would cut themselves off from the potential of good winning over evil, of righteousness outmatching sin, of new life superseding death? Who would limit the power of Christ? Who wouldn’t leap at the possibility of this kind of peace?

Paul presents this spectacular promise: No matter what our difficulty may be—God will grant us peace: In the middle of conflict. As we work through conflict. As we emerge from conflict. It was a new idea for the Thessalonians. And it may be a new idea for us.

Why? I don’t know. Why would we miss the promise of God, that, no matter what our difficulty is, we can have peace in solving it? Many Christians neglect to draw upon this “sustained and dependable peace” when they are facing difficulties. Often, when people seek help with a difficulty, they are all upset and troubled. It shows in the way they talk. It shows in the manner they project to others. It shows when they are deeply troubled. At times like that, it becomes a Christian to say to them:

"I will be delighted to lend a hand with your difficulty. But you have another difficulty that has to be resolved first. The difficulty you have to resolve first is your "shortness of peace." It is like shortness of breath. Without it, you cannot address anything else. You are not peaceful. You are a believer, but you are not at peace, and you will never resolve the other difficulty until you learn how to have peace."

The second letter to the Thessalonians concludes with that larger reminder that the Lord of Peace is with you. It says: God is in control. Your life will not sink. There may be storms. But God will see you through them.

God longs to give you that perfect peace. A peaceful mind. A peaceful outlook on life. A peaceful witness to others. Be at peace. God longs to remind you that God can handle your difficulties. God is with you. God will help you work this out. Be at peace.

Then, once you are at peace, you can come at the difficulty with a quite different attitude. "The Lord of peace be with you. The Lord be with you all."