

Today's Fruit is Peace. This is one of the fruit (and there are several) that the vast majority of us see and nod our heads knowingly. We understand this fruit. We would say Peace is when no one is fighting. No war, no conflict. Peace is a settled world. When we're stressed out, we even call for "Peace and Quiet", right?

But while we have a concept of peace in our minds, few of us would say that we have peace of mind. Ask most people today if they'd consider their lives peaceful and you get sort of a confused, glazed look for a moment, then a few muttered excuses.

Or, if you ask a parent, you just get laughed at.

Peace in our day-to-day life? Most of us would agree... not likely.

And beyond that, we're certainly aware peace is a rare thing in our larger world. Between the ongoing War on Terror, the Kony 2012 stuff and ceaseless crime-reporting in the media, the ever-uglier election battles, everywhere we look we see unrest. Discord. War.

Not peace.

So... here's this fruit of the Spirit. Peace. Is it a pipe dream? A nice theory but just not practical in today's hustle-and-bustle world?

I say, No. We can find peace. We can be a peaceful people. Peace is right here, among us, waiting to be grasped.

And it's not that we need to work harder. We need to work smarter. Our vision, our understanding of Peace is too small. We settle for too little.

We need a bigger vision.

Peace isn't only the absence of conflict - when we heave a great exasperated sigh and wish for "a few moments peace", that's what we're thinking: a bit of silence, a short break. Just a couple of hours (or a couple of minutes) where the world's not going to end if we don't get the next thing done. A pause to catch our breath. That's what we think of as peace, but that's too small!

Peace isn't just a lack of busyness. Peace isn't just an absence of fighting. Peace is a positive state. It's a place you work towards, a kind of life you learn to live. Peace is a gift from God, a fruit of the Holy Spirit that grows from the lives of those who follow Jesus. So let's figure out what it looks like:

In the Scriptures, Peace is a greeting. In Greek it's Irene, in Hebrew, Shalom. Today in Israel, the customary greeting is still "Peace" (which is way better, IMO, than 'Sup?) Throughout the Scriptures, the concept of Peace is tied to resting (no wonder we think of Peace as stillness, right?). And for thousands of years, students of the Scriptures have connected Peace to the Sabbath day. Shalom, Peace is what happens when the world is as it should be, the way God created it to be.

Isn't that so much *more* than you usually think of when you think of Peace? That's so much more than just a break from activity. More than just a cease-fire at work or home. It's a *positive* movement forward. It's leaning into relationships. It's knowing the world is going somewhere and God has invited us to be a part of it.

This understanding of Peace as Shalom is where our Greeting time originated. In older Church traditions, the Greeting Time is actually called "Passing the Peace". The reason we put it into the worship gathering is because we all know we live in a chaotic world.

It's easy to feel out there like you're living in Chaos, drowning in an ocean of never-ending responsibilities, piles of bills, too many activities, worries about the future, broken or breaking relationships and so on.

And we gather here once a week to remind each other that we are created in the image of the Creator. That we were created not for drowning in work, but for rest, for celebration. That even though we broke the world, God is recreating all things. That the Sunday Jesus rose from the dead is the first day of a new creation week.

So we greet each other, not to make new friends (because a handshake is way too superficial for that - we all know that). We greet each other to remind each other that we were created for Peace, for Shalom, for Rest.

Let's pause for a minute or two right now. Stand up, stretch your legs and pass some peace to those around you. Let your smiles and your handshakes be a simple reminder that Peace is a gift from the God we worship.

Greeting Time

The Greeting time is one of my favorite parts of our gatherings. I love the simple reminder every Sunday that we were created for Peace. But what does that Sabbath Rest really look like? How do I live peacefully? I don't know about you, but I still equate Sabbath with Sloth. For us, for our culture, Rest is sleep. Peace is inactivity. But that's not how the Scriptures understand Sabbath. Rest isn't inactivity. Consider probably the other most famous instance of Sabbath in the Scriptures, in the 10 Commandments. Keeping Sabbath is 4th. Here's how the list in Deuteronomy talks about Sabbath. Pay special attention to WHY Sabbath matters:

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work... Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, but the LORD your God brought you out with his strong hand and powerful arm. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day. -- Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (NLT)

The Israelites used to be slaves. In Egypt, if you go back to the story of the Exodus, all they did all day every day was make bricks. Their worth to the Empire was measurable. Their lives were worth exactly how many bricks they made.

Can you imagine that? Being told your value as a person amounted to how much mud and straw you could pack in a day? Working all day in the hot desert sun, shaping a pile of bricks, and as you stagger back to your bed, knowing you have to get up and do it all again tomorrow, you see that pile you made and know that's all your life is worth?

How demoralizing that would be? How dehumanizing it is to reduce a person to a pile of mud?

But then, it doesn't seem that we've learned much in the last 3,500 years. How many of us still draw our value as human beings from what we make? Okay, it's not literal bricks anymore (probably). Maybe now it's the number of zeros on your paycheck. Maybe it's the car you drive. The size of your house. What team your kid makes it on, or their grades or how many activities they're in. Maybe it's how much work you do, the hours you put in or the people you help. What are the bricks you make? How do you evaluate your life? Where does your self-worth come from?

We need to know what those are in our own lives because as God's people, we know we're not brick-makers. God freed the Israelites. God said, My people will not be known as brick-makers. No one created in my image can be measured in bricks.

And God knows how easy it is to forget that. How quickly we start to draw our self-worth from what we build, what we accomplish. How easily we forget that we were created in the image of a God who worked for six days, and Rested on the seventh.

In fact, this whole passage in Deuteronomy is set right as the Israelites are preparing to enter into the Promised Land. Their journey from brick-making slaves to free people is almost finished. Their journey from the restlessness of wandering in the wilderness to resting in their new Home is almost over.

But when they enter the Promised Land, their work isn't done. In fact, it's just beginning. They're going to have to farm, to raise livestock. They're going to have to make tons of bricks to build all their new homes. So what's the difference between the Promised Land and Egypt?

In the Promised Land, you only make bricks six days per week. That other day, the day where in Egypt you'd still be making bricks, you take a day to rest. To enjoy. In the Promised Land, you're not brick-makers. You're the children of God who make bricks sometimes.

And that's a huge difference.

We so easily become slaves to accomplishments. Slaves to our cultural values.

But God freed Israel from Egyptian slavery. We were made for the Promised Land. We're created in God's image. But in the day-to-day grind of brick-making, that's easy to forget.

So God gave us a command: once weekly, everyone stops making bricks. Once weekly, you just take a break and ENJOY your life. Celebrate. Throw a party. Quit making bricks. Just for a day.

During Advent, we raised over \$100,000 to build a new dorm for the Arbre de Vie orphanage in Benin (a country in West Africa). I don't know how many of you saw the update on Facebook this week, but the orphanage broke ground on the new dormitory this week.

In order to build the dorm, they're actually making bricks. Literally. They need about 11,000 bricks to construct the building so for the past month or so they've been making bricks. They've got around 6,000 so far.

Do a thought experiment with me: can we imagine for a moment that all they ever do is keep making bricks? If they can do 5,000-6,000 each month, what would happen if they just kept making bricks? Within a couple of years, they'd have 10s of thousands of bricks. All just sitting out in the sun, an ever-expanding field of bricks just... sitting there.

How stupid would that be? If they never actually built the new dorm, if the kids kept sleeping 15-to-a-room while all those bricks just... sat there?

We'd say that's foolish. We'd probably get all kinds of frustrated and angry. Not because they made some bricks. Making bricks is good. It's necessary right now! But you don't make bricks just to make bricks. The bricks are for a purpose: to build a home.

Only slaves build bricks and never enjoy them. That's what happened in Egypt. God's children build bricks to make a home in the Promised Land.

And yet...

How many of us live our lives as brick-makers? How many of us just build and build and build and never take time to enjoy? To celebrate? Truth we told, we're not very good at that. Most of us are so busy building our lives that we never actually LIVE them.

And *that's* not peace. That's not what God created us for. Work is good - we do six days of work. We make bricks for six days. Building is good. It's necessary. But that's not the end goal. It's not who we are.

We build so we can celebrate. We work so we can rest. Enjoy.

The Sabbath Rest, the Peace that God gives us isn't inactivity. It's not falling down after six back-breaking days of brick-making too exhausted to move. Sabbath Rest is celebration. It's stopping the building process to *enjoy* what you're building. It's BEING home instead of constantly BUILDING it.

Peace is something we're always working towards, but it's also something we stop to celebrate. With that in mind, I want to introduce you to a friend of mine who's a part of our congregation: everyone, meet Jeff Sitler. In his free time, Jeff is a wrestling coach, and he's using his passion to bring Peace to some very chaotic situations.

Interview with Jeff Sitler

1. Jeff, tell us about Wrestle Against Autism. (Give us a short introduction to the Event itself. How long has it been going on, how many participate)
2. Tell us a little about autism. How does WAA help those families? (Basic sketch of autism and some of the stuff you do. Love the stories about the animals)

3. This event is a lot of work, right? How do you celebrate? (Talk about all the work you put into putting on the event each year, and then how you celebrate with the families)
4. How can we as your Church family support you and WAA? (Talk about volunteer opportunities)

Jeff's event is a wonderful example of the fruit of Peace. As Christians, we work hard to bring peace in our world. We know that Jesus' resurrection is the first moment, the beginning move in the new creation story. That's what Jesus meant when he told his disciples

I am leaving you with a gift-- peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. -- John 14:27 (NLT)

It's easy to feel even today that we're drowning in bricks. That our whole lives are spent building, building, building. How often do we stop and actually enjoy what we're building? How often do we seek out the simple pleasures of the fact that we're alive, that we are created in God's image, and we get to be a part of rescuing the world?

How do YOU practice Sabbath? (And since none of us actually practices Sabbath, let's dream about what it CAN look like.)

Consider a few questions with me:

1. **What activities make you feel the most alive?** (Maybe it's lawn work. Maybe it's playing with your kids. Maybe it's reading a good book or cooking a big meal for your friends. Amanda and I both really enjoy having people over to our home, so we'll do that.)
2. **What activities affirm your relationship with God?** (What activities help remind you that you are first and foremost God's child? Maybe that's reading Scripture or praying. Maybe it's going for a run or camping or something outside in creation. Maybe it's taking some time just to be alone, enjoying silence and stillness.)
3. **How can you make those practices part of your weekly routine?** (The reality is not all of us have jobs that fulfill us. Some of us are at a place in our lives where our occupations or home lives are just hard. Six days a week, you may just have to put your head down and get to work. But it is *vital* that you create space for yourself to experience Sabbath Peace. God commands it not because God hates work, but because God loves you and wants to see you thrive, not just survive.)

Our personal and corporate Sabbaths are part of God's whole rescue mission. Because of Jesus' resurrection, we are in the midst of a new creation. God is healing the world, once again ordering what we plunged into Chaos. Everything is headed towards a new Sabbath day, a new Shalom.

One day, we'll all rest, together with God. Not sleeping. Not laying around. But enjoying creation with God and each other, the way God had intended all along.

So there is a Sabbath rest still waiting for the people of God. For all who have entered into God's rest have rested from their labors, just as God did after creating the world. -- Hebrews 4:9-10 (NLT)

A final Sabbath is coming. Until then, we get together every week. We remind each other that Jesus rose from the dead, and that means we're not Egypt's brick-makers. We gather here to celebrate and enjoy the Home we're building with Jesus.

We stop to celebrate what God is doing in our world.

So we celebrate when families affected by autism find joy and healing. We celebrate when orphanages build new homes for their children. We celebrate that in the last few weeks, we dedicated 8 children to God and baptized 25 new followers of Jesus. We celebrate that God is doing good work among us. That we get to join in through Target: Dayton, Feed the Creek, our mission trips, Bridge Cafe and so much more.

We pause and enjoy what we're doing, what God is doing. We stop building our lives just for a day and actually live them.

Peace is not sleepy inactivity. It's the difference between the restlessness of the Exile, the nomad and the rest of building a home in the Promised Land.

Peace isn't the absence of conflict. It's the difference between making Egypt's bricks and bringing God's kingdom here on Earth as it is in Heaven.

Peace isn't what happens after the last bombs drop and the final bullets fly and bodies litter the battlefields. It's the difference between work that perpetuates a culture that only brings death and building a new kingdom, bringing life in the midst of Death.

Chaos --> Order SetUp

We close today with an opportunity to reflect on the journey towards Peace. One of the great songs of the American Church is "It Is Well With My Soul". The song was written in 1873 by a lawyer named Horatio Spafford. Having lost his wealth in the great Chicago Fire, Spafford planned to travel to Europe with his family. He sent them ahead, and en route, their ship hit another and sank. Spafford's four daughters died; only his wife survived. After the accident, when Spafford was on his way to his wife, he wrote this now-famous song as his ship passed the site of the accident that claimed his daughters' lives.

"It is Well With My Soul" is written from the middle of the worst chaos of life. Knowing the circumstances makes singing the words all the more poignant. They become an invitation for us to consider our own lives: Do we draw our Peace from God's promise of rest?

Today, the song will move from chaos to order. You'll hear, faintly at first, the order of the familiar melody begin to emerge, a melody that will continue to grow in strength as the song moves forward.

During that time, reflect on your own life. Where is the chaos? Where do you get caught up in brick-making and forget to live your life, to celebrate? What does it look like for you to take a Sabbath rest? To enjoy the life you're building? To join in with God in bringing order to a chaotic world? How can you embrace the Peace of Christ?

Benediction

May the LORD bless you and protect you. May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you.
May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace. -- Numbers 6:24-26 (NLT)

And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. Colossians 3:15 (NLT)