



# Simple Gifts

Words to Inspire the Spirit

IMMANUEL CHURCH-ON-THE-HILL

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## The Day of Peace

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Today, what's at the front of your heart and mind?

I saw a parents' blog the other day, saying that with all that's happening in world news, we often just need to focus on what's right in front of us, in our own lives. The mom blogger wrote that sometimes it's just too much to handle.

And yet, as some people commented on the blog, we can't ignore what's going on all around us. In world news, even in our own nation on any given day, we are presented with things for which we worry, often things like war and injustice, which break our hearts as fellow human beings.

War and conflict are nothing new to us, as humans, or even as Christians. Even the Bible, God's love story for us, contains conflict, violence, and death. Beginning with Cain and Abel in the Old Testament, we see how sin has entered in and threatened relationships. Brother turns against brother.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen: your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! (Genesis 4:9-10).

And when Jesus is being arrested, Matthew's Gospel tells us that Peter put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus immediately responds, "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:51-52).

Ever since sin entered into creation, conflict and violence have been ever-present. Peace, on the other hand, sounds like something far off and impossible. It's something wished for and prayed for, but not often something believed possible.

But then Jesus entered into humanity, and with him came the promise of peace. Not a possibility...a promise. The peace of Jesus is a not a peace that the world gives. It is a peace that is demonstrated in loving enemies, praying for those who persecute you, and showing mercy even to those who kill you. In other words, the peace of Christ is a peace that we as human beings don't truly or *fully* know, for so many in our world have been taught to retaliate and respond out of anger and fear when wronged.

"Where is Christ's peace now?" we may find ourselves asking. And in the face of conflict, what can we do about it? What should we even be praying for?

The peace of Christ is both present and not yet fully present in our world. We live in God's Kingdom breaking in, the already, but not yet.

The other day at church, Abigail, our one and one-half year-old daughter, began extending her hand and saying the word, "Peace" to everyone before the Passing of the Peace began, and she continued it, even as the worship service moved ahead. She didn't discriminate, reaching out to everyone in our pew and then reaching over to the other pews. In that moment, I thought, this is the peace we long for – not a temporary patch until the next conflict, but a peace that lasts and is never-ending. A peace that doesn't discriminate because of difference.

In the midst of conflict, we can look for the peacemakers and the signs of peace breaking in. Doing so doesn't diminish the tragedy and the heartbreak going on as well. Still, it does remind us that we have hope for "the peace of God that surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). We have a future hope and promise in Jesus, that all will be made right, and all will be made new.

And what can we do as well? We can seek to act in peace even towards our enemies and those who are different from us. The more we seek to understand those who are different, even if we don't agree with them, the more we can see that they are human beings, too, made in God's image. This doesn't diminish humanity's wrongdoing in any way. In fact, acts of genocide, terrorism, or persecution of others should *always* be condemned. While loving our enemies doesn't mean we need to condone their behavior, it does mean that we must recognize that they are made in the image of God and loved by him, too.

We can pray for Christ's peace to descend upon all places of conflict and war. We may feel like taking sides and praying for only one group of people over another in any conflict, but as Christians, we are called to pray for all involved, most especially the vulnerable, and innocent, and all casualties. Praying does not equate to condoning any behavior. Even Jesus prayed for hearts to change, eyes to see, and ears to hear God's Kingdom come.

Conflict will always be with us until Christ's return; yet peace will continue to break in and God's Kingdom will continue to grow, even if we only see little sprouts of peace here and now. In the meanwhile, we remember the promise of peace from Jesus, a peace that is everlasting. We have that promise, and we can cling to it, as we work for peace now.

The day of Christ's perfect peace will one day be here, and when it comes, it will never cease. Oh, that it may come soon!

As you pray for peace, may you find solace listening to this hymn that has been on my heart recently – [\*O Day of Peace\*](#).