

**Pastor Liz's Sermon for Easter 2, April 27, 2025**  
**"Peace Be With You"**

An article came across my Facebook feed this week. It was entitled "37 Calm Quotes That Will bring You Inner Peace." Inner peace...Hmmm. Peace is one of the main words in today's gospel reading so I dove in to see what wisdom the article might contain. The posting read, *"When you place your life and its actions in the context of the bigger picture, things often turn out to be less stressful than you may think. Learning how to **feel in control**, even when it seems like everything is going wrong, is one way to start."* Feeling in control. Another...Hmmm. Not quite what was going on with the disciples hiding behind closed doors. This may get interesting, I thought to myself. So I scrolled through the 37 calm quotes to see what they might say about peace.

Bruce Lee, the martial artist, was quoted as saying, *"True inner peace comes from within. Embrace true freedom by not internalizing the opinions, thoughts, and judgments of others."*

"Breathing is the key to peace," offered Tao Porchon-Lynch, American yoga master.

*"Set peace of mind as your highest goal and organize your life around it"* was the advice of Brian Tracey, motivational public speaker and self-development author. *"Saying you're going to find your inner peace is one thing, but actually doing it is something else entirely. Dedicate your life to your happiness and watch as opportunities unfold."*

*"There can be no peace without but through peace within,"* wrote W.E. Channing, American author and moralist. *"To become peaceful and centered, you first need to work on yourself. These internal changes will eventually become apparent externally."* as Channing so eloquently described the process.

Oprah had a few things to say as well. Those quotes went on and on. What did I learn about inner peace from them? That peace comes from inside us. Our breathing is the key. It's something that we find. It can be unlocked. It stems from happiness and the opportunities that unfold from being happy. In short, having inner peace was portrayed as an individual initiative and enterprise,

much like Norman Vincent Peale's "Power of Positive Thinking." These quotes seemed to be closely associated with his teaching that positive thoughts, positive declarations will bring health, wealth and happiness, like this affirmation: *"This is beautiful day to be your own biggest fan. You are the only person who knows every detail of the path you took to make it so far."*

But affirmations said to ourselves are rather thin when the chips are down, when life is troublesome, and friends are few. Or the reverse, when life is great, and we have friends that aren't really interested in our happiness. Our egos aren't enough if they are our only support, and fear can start to set in. What or who can we rely on? Why aren't we enough? What are we doing wrong?

There's one person I know of who was not into teaching positive affirmations, one person who was not quoted on the Facebook posting: Jesus. Jesus is the one who appeared before his disciples that evening on the day of resurrection and said, *"Peace be with you."*

The peace that Jesus gives is so different from individualistic positive affirmations. There's a theology of glory where God is made in a human image, with the assumption that God thinks and operates in a way closely corresponding to the way we operate as human beings. Humans worship God and God gives us all good things - a quid pro quo in essence. This theology expects the Christian life to consist of nothing but success, victory, complete understanding, and the solution to all our problems.

But the theology of glory stands in opposition to the theology of the cross in which God comes to us and saves us and calls us to what American author Flannery O'Connor called "the sweat and the stink of the cross." In the theology of the cross, we understand God to be revealed in the broken flesh of Jesus Christ hanging upon the cross and that reality contradicts human expectations. We're not promised health and wealth and prosperity. What we are promised is Jesus himself. We are united with Christ in His death and resurrection. We are sent out by his self-giving love to love sacrificially, to enter the suffering and the joys of the world, to give and receive the grace-filled forgiveness of God, to trust not in ourselves but in Christ and His

promises, and to know that the blessing of this union is shalom, is peace. True peace.

Think back to that evening on the day of resurrection when the disciples were huddled together in the upper room behind locked doors. Remember that they had just seen Jesus, the one whom they left everything to follow, put to death. Could they rely on themselves to see them through the coming days? To go about their lives and figure out what to do next? Would uttering positive affirmations to rightened hearts and minds produce calmness and inner peace? No - they were behind locked doors out of fear - fear that they too would be arrested and killed, persecuted as followers of Jesus. Is there any wonder they were afraid? And think of Thomas, eight days later, angered, untrusting and afraid at having missed out on Jesus' appearance. We know that living in a state of fear does strange things. Sleep becomes elusive, fatigue sets in weakening our physical health. It places us in a sort of bondage and steals our joy. It destroys our ability to do the things we need to do. It overpowers our rational thinking. Centered on ourselves and our immediate situation, we can easily overlook God's truths and promises. And the more we fear, the less we trust God to see us through our circumstances and the farther away God seems to be.

We are familiar with fear in our own lives. Right now, we are bombarded by world events: economic crises caused by our neighbour to the south, the threat of more natural disasters shaped by climate change, measles outbreaks and other life-threatening diseases, decreasing civility in conversations and media postings, worry over Monday's election results, and the list goes on. That's on top of all the other fears we face: whether we'll be able to land a job or stay employed, whether our wages or savings will be enough to survive on, and what the prognosis will be if we're diagnosed with a serious medical condition. Some people grapple with fear of rejection, failure, shame, being alone, crowds, change, or the unknown.

Being fearful of these things isn't necessarily wrong. However, the fear that dominates our lives and our ability to fully live, is what the gospel message warns us about when it tells us repeatedly, "*Fear not*," "*Do not be afraid*," "*Do not worry*," and "*Be anxious for nothing*".

Jesus, *“the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth...who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father”* (Revelation 1: 4-6) steps into our fears and proclaims, *“Peace be with you.”* He is the one who describes peace: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”* (John 14:27) *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* (John 16:33)

Jesus would have used the Hebrew word ‘shalom’. The English language translates “shalom” as ‘peace’ but there is an additional layer of meaning to the Hebrew word. “Shalom lehkhem” (Peace to you) is what Jesus would have spoken to greet his disciples. The root word of “shalom” is “shalam”, which means “to make whole,” or “to restore” with an overall sense of fulness, well-being and completeness where nothing is lacking in mind, body and spirit.

Remember what the angel messengers who know and continually dwell in the presence and fullness of God’s Shalom spoke when Jesus was born, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among all people with whom God is well pleased.”* (Luke 2: 14) With their understanding of who God is and of God’s love and peace that are God’s character, they could have said it like this: *“Glory to God in the most high place! No one is more loving and generous than the One who personifies pure Peace among sinful humanity! What an earth-shaking plan! The fulness of Peace is now physically on earth in this child as a loving gift to all whom God favours.”* (The True Meaning of Shalom, Doug Hershey) Jesus is our peace! We have peace with God through him. He has overcome the world and the power of sin and death through the cross. The peace of God is the opposite of all that the world - with its affirmations - has to offer. The peace Jesus offers us is complete, consistent, whole, and perfect regardless of what is going on in our lives. It doesn’t remove the trials and tribulations of life, but it allows us to move through them with trust in the One who created and loves us.

Jesus was the source of peace then for His disciples and His followers through the ensuing years, and Jesus is our source of peace now. There is an assurance of God’s faithfulness, goodness, and promises wrapped up in the

words, “Peace Be with You.” And when we share the peace, as we will a bit later in our worship, it’s not just a quick “Hi” or a nod. We are extending the wholeness and well-being that is ours in Christ Jesus with each other. It is the practicing of “a communal way of life framed by Christ’s peace” (Passing the Peace: Help Your Congregation Embrace a Communal Way of Life, Paul Ryan) that makes the words and this gesture so significant.

In every area of our lives, regardless of what is happening around us, may Christ’s peace that transcends all our human understanding be found with us and in us.

Let us pray: Christ Jesus, you who are the soul and heart of life, save us from fear - the fear of days and nights yet to be, the fear of the known and the unknown, the fear that builds high walls around our spirits and our lives, the fear that closes in and envelops us, the fear that nibbles at the edges of every satisfaction. Free us from fear of failure and success, of shame and pain, of death and fear of life as well. Open our eyes...that we may see your way of peace still is our path, our joy, our way. Amen. (*adapted from "A Palm Sunday Prayer" by David Johnson*)