

## First Mennonite Church Edmonton

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It's been a rough week this week. We, as a congregation, have lost two long standing members of our church this week, Neil Toews, and David Friesen. Understandably, our hearts are heavy this morning. It seems a bit antithetical for a week with such heaviness for us to be gathering for the first time and to celebrate that we're together once again. And...at the same time, what better and more fitting opportunity do we have to collectively mourn and grieve and to seek comfort and solace in with our community and with our God.

I was going to speak this morning about peace, about the difficulties that we are having with the polarization around us. Of how sometimes we need to think a little more personally about peace and how to imagine how we can create peace at home. I wanted to talk about how, maybe, the best way to be peacemakers at home right now, is not to argue or debate, to debunk, or try to convince those near and dear to us who share differing opinions. Perhaps the best way for us to be peacemakers at home is to perhaps lay the ground work so that healing and reconciliation can take place once the pandemic ends. Because it will end, and when it does, our families will remain, and we will have to pick up the pieces of the strained relationships.

That what I WAS going to speak to, I was going to elegantly (somehow) weave in the Joseph story. And then...and then...and then...as I thought about it yesterday, it didn't seem to be the right thing to talk about.

Instead I want to offer us a reflection on peace of heart, and soul.

As Heather and our scripture readers shared, the story of Joseph and his brothers is a long odyssey, spanning multiple chapters of Genesis, this story is quite the drama. Through treachery, grief, shame, humility, deception, grace and gratitude, this story offers us a somewhat honest picture of one of the foundational families of the Hebrew, and our scriptures.

For us today, what strikes me, is how the story resolves. And I won't summarize it, but I want to highlight the end of Chapter 46 of Genesis.

**Genesis 46:28-30** When they came to the land of Goshen, <sup>29</sup> Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to meet his father Jacob in Goshen. He presented himself to him, fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. <sup>30</sup> Jacob said to Joseph, "I can die now, having seen for myself that you are still alive."

Ever since Joseph had been sold off into slavery, Jacob, understandably, had this hole in his life, a question that was never answered; his spirit couldn't rest until he knew the answer, was Jacob alive or not? In some ways we could talk about how his spirit was

troubled. I know for me that if there is something significant that's unresolved, it picks away at me, there's always a part of my mind working away trying to resolve the perhaps unresolvable. I suspect it was like that for Jacob for the better part of his life.

Now thinking about us today, I would suggest that we are also living with this tension of unresolved things. Our spirits are perhaps troubled today, by the weight of sadness, of loss. As it was highlighted earlier, there have been a great many losses this year, and this week just adds to it. Or perhaps our spirits are troubled because of the ongoing, lingering, anguishing pandemic, something that just seems to be weighing us down. Or, we may have spirits troubled by other stresses that we may normally be able to handle, but some days they just seem like too much. Perhaps it's finances, or other family matters. All these things tend to fatigue our spirits, and sometimes can make peace of mind, peace of spirit seem to be elusive. As I think about the week ahead, I'm holding tightly to a gift from Jesus. In the Gospel of John, during the last supper Jesus says:

**John 14:27** <sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

I'm holding onto this for two reasons, the first is that Peace of Mind, Spirit, Heart, is a gift from God, and it's something that God desires FOR us. The second, it cannot be taken away.

Peace is more than the causes we advocate for, it's more than the justice we seek and work for, peace is also something that our hearts seek. Peace is what our hearts long for in our grief. Peace, then, is also the comfort and the assurance that God is with us, Jesus is near, and the Holy Spirit surrounds us, in our grief, and in our joy.

And, yes, one way we show that we are peacemakers is by working with God to bring justice to places of injustice, to bring healing and hope to places of discord in the world, and to help with reconciliation efforts. The other way is to also be people with a peace of mind, a peace of heart and a peace of spirit. That is the other dimension, that is the other way to show and share peace with the world; this is the being peaceful part.

In the face of grief and sadness, so often we feel helpless, there's little we can do, but there is much that we can be. We can be with those who mourn, we can sit with, be present to, support, care, and encourage along the way. We can show and share the Peace that Jesus leaves, a peace that does not go away. We can show and share a Peace of heart and spirit that weeps when others weep, that laughs when others laugh.

This is the peace that shows by us simply being who we are as Children of God. This is the fruit that shown by us being people who follow the Jesus way. This is the fruit that's borne of the Spirit at work in our lives.

Our guiding scripture for this series, in addition to the Fruits of the Spirit is: I come that you may have life and have it abundantly. And I do believe that this is what both God and Jesus desire for us, abundant life. And as we reflected last week, they desire that

we experience abundant love and joy in our lives, this week, I believe, that God and Jesus long for us to experience and live abundant peace, peace of mind, peace of heart, peace of spirit. And there are many things that can get in the way of that experience of peace, and yet...there are ways that we can reach out and touch that life of peace again.

Prayer, any kind of prayer, whether it's a deep sigh, a cry, or even a cathartic shout, can be a release, offering to God what we're carrying, meditative prayer can still our minds and our hearts. Prayer can begin the journey to peace. Offering grace, either to ourselves or to others, can help us let go of things that maybe we don't need to carry anymore, or event aren't ours to carry, and perhaps that can open the door for reconciliation. And being ready to notice where and how God is at work in our lives. This is of course a very poor checklist, but I'm hoping to illustrate how these things we've known since childhood, are ways that we can bring peace into, or back into our lives.

Admittedly, this all feels a bit scattered and that's probably because it's been a bit of a scattered week. But what I want you to walk away with is this. God desires for us to have an abundant life, part of that abundant life is a life with peace. Peace can seem elusive, there are many things that compete to draw our attention away from peace. Through prayer and grace we can get a hold of, for the first time or again, a sense of peace of heart, mind and spirit. And as you live into that peace, it will flow through you to the world.

Now, I don't want this to seem like a memorial service by way of this reflection, but I do want to end this with a portion of the prayer of blessing I use at the end of memorials. The words have been rattling around in my head as I've prepared for this morning. So please receive this blessing as we end this time:

May the love of God be above you to overshadow you  
beneath you to uphold you  
before you to guide you,  
behind you to protect you,  
close beside you and within you  
    to make you able for all things,  
    and to reward both your faith  
    and your faithfulness  
    with a joy and a peace  
        that the world cannot give,  
        neither can it take away.

Amen.