

John 14:27 & 16:33 - CHRISTMAS EVE-Emotions of Christmas: Turmoil & Peace

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

For those of you who right now have a question in your mind of most importance, what is a homily? Homily is a Greek word for about 20 minutes or so.

So now you know what to expect. This Christmas season here at Southwood, we've been seeking to slow down a little bit, to consider our hearts and how the Christmas story that we've read tonight, that we've celebrated, this month especially, would speak to our deepest emotions.

We've discussed longing and hope, grief and comfort, apathy and awe. And tonight I want us to consider for just a few minutes turmoil and peace.

Turmoil and peace. As I thought about those two particular emotions, turmoil and peace, the picture that came into my mind was of an arcade game from my childhood.

[1 : 17] You may know it as whack-a-mole. In this game, whack-a-mole, essentially you hold this big padded mallet and you stand in front of a board with several holes, maybe a dozen or so holes.

And when the game starts, little plastic moles begin to pop up from one hole or another. And when a mole pops up, what do you do? You whack it. You whack the mole.

And then another mole pops up and you whack that one. But what happens as the game goes on is that they come faster and faster. And first it's one over here and then it's two over there. And then the one you just thought you knocked earlier pops up again.

And by the end of the game, your head is spinning. You're just whacking wildly, hoping to hit at something. To make contact with some mole that might pop up. If you haven't played the game before, it's really fun.

You should go to an arcade and find it sometimes. But many days I feel like that's a pretty good picture of the turmoil in my life and in my heart.

[2 : 19] If I ever get control of one area and feel like there's a little bit of peace and calm there, something else pops up. And it's hard to get everything under control.

Something always needs my immediate attention. Maybe you've felt that before. At first it's your kids and then it's your parents. And then when they're calming down and things seem to be under control, things just unravel at work.

And it's out of control. You don't know what to do about it. And then you start thinking, I'm just a really bad neighbor. I need to spend time. Oh no, my marriage needs attention.

What am I doing? And let's be honest. Those moles never wait for each other, do they? It feels like always more than one at a time is in crisis mode.

Crying for your attention. Needing to be dealt with. Thankfully though, the Christmas season is the season of great peace. Where I experience the utter calm and tranquility of life through the entire month of December.

[3 : 26] Except for the cold we're passing around. Those Christmas cards we need to mail. It's an appetizer for the party Friday. And is it a dessert for Saturday night? I think that...

Did we get a gift for your mom? Oh no, we've forgotten to get ready for Christmas Eve. And relationships are starting to feel a little bit tense. And strained.

Things are piling up. And then on top of it, all your family expects you to come to a Christmas Eve service? What in the world? How am I going to do all of this?

Our lives year round and at Christmas are full of that turmoil. Aren't they? We feel anxious. Restless. Yes. Often exhausted.

But I think for most of us, we've just kind of gotten used to it. And called it normal. And given up the hope of ever having a deep sense of peace on most days, haven't we?

[4 : 23] Well, Christmas is actually about peace. Although perhaps not in the way we've hoped or envisioned. Jesus says something interesting to His disciples as He prepares to go to the cross.

And leave them. He says in John chapter 14, 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 be afraid. Jesus is concerned for the hearts of His disciples. He doesn't want them troubled, does He?

Or afraid or in turmoil. Rather, He wants them to be what? At peace. That's His desire for them. But He makes it clear that this peace that He offers them and wants for them is very different from the peace that the world offers.

How does the world offer peace? I want to suggest tonight the world offers two potential paths to peace. Path one is to get enough control over your circumstances that then you can be at peace.

[5 : 38] Peace is found when things are good enough or when you have enough control over them. You have enough power. You have enough money to get what you need. To find peace, you need to get enough of the right kind of people in your life.

A spouse who treats you better. A boss who appreciates you more. And so on. You need to whack enough of the moles so that you're in charge of everything around you and can finally, confidently rest.

That's one path. And it proves for most of us very difficult. Although we often find ourselves desperately on it time and time again, don't we? Thinking there's going to be peace at the end of this.

And so there's path two. Path two, which became very popular a few decades ago when some of you were young people, was a lot about peace, wasn't it?

It's a path to this peaceful, easy feeling. That kind of peace. Where you don't control your circumstances. No way. Rather, you just let go. And you ignore and quit caring about the difficult life.

[6 : 49] Check out. The real world is just too hard. So just ignore it. It's mental gymnastics to pretend that you're resting, but no actual substance behind it.

No solid reason to be at peace. Just a lot of peace, man. Just peace. But you don't really feel peace. Life is still difficult.

Do those sound familiar to you? Sometimes I try both of those paths in the course of the same day. I usually start with path one, trying to get everything under control and get everything and everybody where I want them.

And when that doesn't work, I just go to path two and I give up. And I check out and I don't care anymore. And just act and pretend. Everything's okay, right? Self-talk. It's going to be okay. Hakuna Matata. No worries. Everything's fine. But it's not. You see, the peace Jesus offers is entirely different from those paths to peace that the world offers us.

[7 : 53] From the outset, it's different in that it's substantial. Not mere wishful thinking where you quit caring. Not a mere feeling of good cheer or a serenity in a candlelit service.

I'm going to go find one night. But something real and deep that Jesus is actually addressing.

There's an objective reality to the peace that underlies the peaceful feeling we're talking about.

That Jesus wants His followers to have. See, when the Bible talks about peace at Christmas, it talks about things like Jesus as the prince of peace. Isaiah chapter 9.

Of peace on earth, goodwill to men, we heard in Luke 2. That Jesus Himself will be their peace.

Micah 5.5. When the Bible talks about peace, it is typically this objective peace that Jesus comes to achieve between God and man.

It's shalom brought between God and His entire creation, as a matter of fact. False prophets have long come and declared peace, peace, when there's actually no reason for peace.

[9 : 09] When actually the reality that we see all around us is pain and brokenness. When things aren't as they should be, right? And I can't ignore that.

You can't ignore that. You watch the news. You live in this world. You look around and say, peace, really? Something's got to happen. I can't just pretend.

Jesus comes to address the underlying cause of all the turmoil and strife that we experience. He comes to bring reconciliation between the good Creator and His creation that is warring and

rebellion against Him.

Living under a curse due to our sin. Christmas is the launch of that rescue mission, as it were. That project of reconciliation that climaxes at the cross where Jesus dies for sinners.

Where Jesus becomes the curse so He can bring blessing instead of curse. And so He creates peace on earth. Peace between God and mankind.

[10:17] Jesus comes really and truly to address the deep problems that we have and that we see around us. There's something to the peace that He offers.

And it's that objective reality that grounds the true peace for our hearts. The feeling He wants us to experience.

The Bible speaks of that subjective personal peace too. The feeling of being at peace or at rest. But when it does so, it says something I find so comforting.

It's not peace as the world gives. That feeling is not found at the end of getting enough control over our circumstances. It's actually peace right in the midst of them.

Jesus enters into our turmoil. He calls it what it is. And He offers Himself as the source of our peace. Listen to what He says to His disciples in John 16 at verse 33.

[11:24] I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart. I have overcome the world.

Jesus says to His disciples, Listen, you're in the world but you're also in someone else. You can be in Me. Without leaving the world you can be in Me.

And that's going to make all the difference for you. Jesus says I want you to know this peace. I see what you're facing. Tribulation. Trouble.

Difficulty. But my solution is not to avoid that. Not to downplay that. Rather, I want you to trust Me. That I will handle all of that for you.

And I love that because what happens to me when I pursue the world's path to peace. To controlling my circumstances. Thinking that once that happens everything will be okay.

[12:31] You know what I usually get instead of peace? Increased anxiety. And exhaustion. Because I can never get all the way there. I can never get enough in control of myself and the people and the things around me to rest.

I need someone else to trust besides my own control. And at Christmas Jesus enters into our turmoil. He says I'm here with you.

And I'm the one you can trust. I see the moles. I know they're just picking up speed. But I've got you. I love you. You can trust Me.

Isaiah was right when he said that's the only place to find perfect peace. That it comes when your mind has stayed on Me. The one who trusts Me.

The everlasting rock. Peace is found not in getting your life circumstances under control. Not in stopping caring about them.

[13:33] But in trusting Me to control them and to care for you. Peace is an objective reality. It's easy to explain.

Jesus purchases God's eternal favor on the cross. That's peace. Peace as a subjective emotion is harder to articulate, isn't it?

What does it feel like? How do you experience that? How can I actually feel that? Because what happens in my life is anxiety and restlessness always seem to be right there. It's a harder thing to quantify, isn't it?

What's peace like as something I can experience? We and our family have tasted some of it recently. So I'll try to describe it for you this way.

When you hear that your wife has cancer. And they need to test lymph nodes. What you feel is turmoil. Not peace.

[14:36] In fact, feeling peace very quickly becomes quite elusive. It's very hard to grab onto that. There's so many other things spinning in your mind.

And it certainly didn't come. We didn't taste any of that peace through ignoring the difficulty.

Pretending like we didn't care about it. No big deal. It also didn't come through getting control of the circumstances as much as I would have liked that.

This was something I had no control over. You may be facing those realities with adult children. With mental illness.

With marital discord. With many other things and situations in your life. Where you can't control it. And you can't ignore it.

And both of those things are there in your life. Listen, we're so grateful for successful surgeries. For clear pathology reports.

[15 : 37] We're so thankful for that in our family. But there are always more exams. And the anxiety is real. You know it, right?

What next? What's going to happen now? It's easy to be anxious. And so we didn't find true peace even in good test results. We actually began to get tastes of it before that.

Reading psalms together through tears. Psalms that reminded our souls find rest in God alone.

That's where you'll rest. Reading notes of encouragement when we were anxious from y'all. From our brothers and sisters. Yet another one of you telling us about your prayers to God on our behalf. Pleading with God for us and thinking, yeah, that's what we need. Listening to a sermon together about God being good in the midst of difficulty and hardship.

[16 : 43] And so worthy of our trust. Tastes of true peace came in moments like those. Moments where we felt the reality of God's love from His people.

Moments where we realized He was the only one we could trust. Moments where that actually became a good thing for us. Because there were days where Him being the only one we could trust was not necessarily something that made us peaceful.

Moments where that became a good thing because we knew we could trust Him. Where we really believed He had us regardless of the outcome. God's teaching us.

I'm learning that peace with God is something that happened once and we have it forever. Praise the Lord, right? Peace with God. Eternal peace.

But peace in our hearts is something that happens moment by moment. The peace that Jesus gives comes in the midst of our anxiety.

[17 : 47] It comes alongside the troubles of life and the turmoil in our hearts. It involves resting in His arms while the moles pop off all around us and keep going.

But it's peace, y'all, that Jesus gives unlike any other peace you've ever experienced. It's peace that lasts. Peace that really means something.

Peace you can truly and finally feel and rest because He's got you and He's not letting go. That's the peace of Christmas that we can experience.

The baby in the manger reminds us that God loves us so much that He sent His Son to earth in order to restore His relationship with us. That's how much God loves you.

That's how much He wants you are good. He doesn't stand outside our turmoil and just say, Get over it. It's not that big a deal. He enters in. He feels our pain and He tells us there's true rest.

[18 : 52] There's true peace only in Him. This table reminds us that He was born in order to go to the cross for us.

To achieve for us ultimate peace in our greatest turmoil. How much more can we trust Him to care for us now in the turmoils and trials of this life?

If He would send His Son to bring peace in our greatest battle, how much more will He care for us moment by moment and day after day?

That's what this table reminds us of tonight. Let's remember what Jesus said to His disciples when He instituted this supper. The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread.

And when He had given thanks, broke it and said, This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me. In the same way also He took the cup after supper saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood.

[19 : 55] Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Friends, we're so glad that you're all with us tonight. This sacrament is a tangible reminder to us of the peace that we have with God through Jesus Christ.

What He has accomplished for us and we celebrate that tonight. Listen, I'd invite you, if you're here tonight and you don't know that kind of peace, if you don't know Jesus as your Savior, the one who has brought peace between you and the God of the universe, I'd encourage you not to come to this table tonight, but instead to come to Jesus, to actually meet Him, for us to have the chance to talk with you about Him, to tell you about the peace that He brings.

If you do know Him, if Jesus is the one that you have trusted, as the one that's brought peace between you and God, who has dealt with your sins once and for all, so that you are always welcome at God's table, then know that this table is not the table of Southwood.

It's not a Presbyterian table. It is the Lord's table. Jesus sets this table, not me. Jesus would invite you to come and to eat with your Father by faith in Him.

[21 : 28] It's His body and His blood to be a reminder to you again tonight of your peace with God, that your Father is not at war with you, that He loves you.

Of a peace that is established between you and Him forever and that He offers to you again tonight, that you can know every moment of every day in the midst of the difficulties of life.

Let's pray and then we'll come to this table together. Jesus, thank You for giving Yourself for us.

Thank You for Your birth that we celebrate, that You came to be born with a goal in mind and it was not just to be born, but to die.

To give Your life as a ransom for many and we rejoice in Your gracious gift to us tonight. Father, would You set these elements aside?

They're very common in normal bread and wine. Given for us tonight, would You use them in our hearts for a sacred purpose that we might know Your love, that we might not just know it, that we might feel the smile of our Father and His care for us.

[22 : 48] Do that we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

