

Do you ever worry? (I guess that was a dumb question; we all worry!) What do you worry about? How often do you worry? What does worry do to your blood pressure or your ability to relax or sleep? How often has it taken someone to ask what is wrong before you realize you have slipped into an unconscious effort at worry again? Think of how easily and often worry keeps us from the calm assurance we call "peace."

Everyone everywhere is seeking peace – from war, from illness, from uncertainty, from peer pressure, from poverty, from grief, from the anger of politics or the violence of crime and punishment. The list is endless. How much energy, attention, and money is given to those efforts of bringing about peace? And how successful are such efforts?

We execute criminals, but that doesn't bring peace. We elect new leaders, but peace doesn't result. Treaties get signed in one conflict and before the ink is dry a new one breaks out somewhere else. We build bombs, we buy guns, we build fences, we fight wars, we legislate against violence but worry and strife continue. We end marriages, find different jobs, or money, or a lottery ticket will bring peace... but peace is so elusive!

Thousands of years ago, the great prophet Ezekiel shouted, "everyone promises peace, but there is no peace!" That is the same cry today as many seek the wisdom, power, and control to force peace. Everyone has answers but no one has yet found the answer or solution to perfect peace.

Jesus turned the tables on this search. He said, "I will give you something I know you need, and you will never find on your own. I give you peace!" (Can it be as easy as that? All we have to do is take what Jesus offers?)

It was easy to be disciples with Jesus "in view," but Jesus knew that soon he would no longer be visibly present, and that is why he had this discussion about peace with his disciples. We understand. For instance, when we can see our kids, we feel peace. When we know Mom and Dad are near and really care about me, we feel at peace.

But worry sneaks back into our vocabulary when we are alone, or move away from home, or life presents disappointments that we never expected. That is why finding TRUE peace becomes so important, and such a blessed gift!

When we are gathered in worship or blown away by an amazing sunset it is easy to know God is close. But when alone, or in the dark, or a new situation we have never faced, how difficult it can be to find peace.

On the night he was preparing to die, Jesus gathered his closest friends and had a last supper with them. After it was over, he talked to them out of concern for what was coming and the reaction of fear, pain, and loss they would naturally fear. It is amazing that rather than struggle with his own death he took the time to prepare disciples to overcome their weakness. It would be like someone having the chance to spend their last hour doing anything they wanted and using that hour to listen to the aches and

pains of those around them.

Jesus shared the words we began with. "*Do not let your hearts be troubled.*" Is there a greater love than to use one's last breath (What wonderful words!) But does it work? Yes, but "only when we let go of what worries us." The Gospels are full of similar words. Remember at both Christmas and Easter the first words from the heavenly messengers were "FEAR NOT!"

Why else did Jesus sleep through a storm on the lake, or talk about God's love for sparrows and flowers except to remind us that HE is our peace? And when we live by faith ... God's gift is always "peace!"

But a question that makes me squirm is, "Have you accepted Jesus as your personal Savior?" I appreciate the intent but am uncomfortable with the assumption that there is something I CAN DO to bring Jesus into my life. He is already my personal savior whether I accept him or not ... but if I reject him, I am rejecting what he brings!

You see, the reality is that Jesus has accepted me. What "peace" when the pressure is off my back through the love of a Savior who stooped to wash my feet! There is nothing I can do to bring peace, but Christ does. And in baptism, communion, prayer, and so many other ways, when we surrender to God's grace, the perfect gift of peace is the presence that heals worry.

The good news is that God's grace has already brought peace to all.

When I surrender my search, my kingdom building, my efforts to get close to God, I am always assured with the promise that God has been with me all along. And so, it is not what I do, but what God does, that gives me the potential and the power of peace.

What is it that you are worried about? Does it help to obsess or chew your fingernails or complain about how unfair life is? You see, "to WORRY" simply means *my fear is greater than my faith*; and FAITH means knowing that God is doing our heavy lifting. And peace is simply knowing someone else "has your back?"

When my oldest daughter died, I couldn't imagine ever coming to terms with that pain or that loss. One of our members, whom I didn't know well at that time came to me one day and said, "welcome to the fraternity no one wants to belong to." You see, his young daughter had died about fifteen years earlier, and he was willing to risk opening his own pain again to offer comfort to mine. Such gifts come only from faith, and such faith brought peace into my life. And that peace can only come as a gift.

The simple antidote to worry is always the same -- to simply accept the same peace which Jesus shared with his disciples. When someone comes to you with arms outstretched for a hug, it is a potential gift, but when you allow those arms to embrace you is when you feel the heartbeat and the warmth of that gift that becomes real to you!

Here is our good news – the Peace of Lord IS WITH US always! Embrace it. Celebrate it.

Share it. Believe it. And God's peace will overwhelm any worry, fear, or doubt.

²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.