

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, April 10, 2022  
Palm Sunday**

**THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT #3:  
THE ELUSIVE FRUIT OF PEACE  
Luke 19:28-44; Philippians 4:4-9**

Say it with me again: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

Two weeks ago, we began to talk about the spiritual fruit of peace, #3 in our countdown of the Apostle Paul’s Top 9 varieties of the fruit of the Spirit. I want to return to the topic of peace today. To focus our thinking, we will look again at Paul’s teaching in Philippians 4. But I want to begin with Luke’s account of the Palm Sunday parade in honor of Jesus in Luke 19, as Jesus made His way from Bethany and Bethphage, on the outskirts of Jerusalem, down the Mount of Olives into the city to the applause and accolades, hosannas and hallelujahs of the crowds.

Let’s give our full and reverent attention to the reading of God’s Word, first from Luke 19:28-44 and then from Philippians 4:4-9.

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**PALM SUNDAY**

Palm Sunday was a day of both celebration and expectation in Jerusalem and beyond. It came on the heels of the raising of Lazarus from the dead by Jesus (John 11). On His way to Jerusalem, Jesus had earlier healed a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, who responded to the gift of his restored sight by joining the band of Jesus’ followers (Mark 10:46-52). Then there was Zacchaeus, a dishonest, disreputable tax collector known as a despicable “sinner” (which he was), a collaborator with the hated Roman occupiers, who met Jesus, received the gift of salvation, and became a new man (Luke 19:1-10). Word of the miracles Jesus performed and the message He taught continued to spread, until the excitement and anticipation overflowed as He approached the city on Palm Sunday.

We call it Palm Sunday, of course, because of the palm branches the parade-goers laid on the road, along with their coats, or waved as Jesus passed by going into the city. Luke doesn’t mention the palm branches. The other three Gospel writers refer to branches, but of them all, only John specifically mentions palm branches (John 12:13).

It was the first-century equivalent of the red carpet, like they have for all the celebrities attending the Oscars or Grammys. Oddly, though, given all the excitement, Jesus did not arrive in Jerusalem riding on a war horse or in a gold-plated chariot. He wasn’t carried on a throne by an elite group of soldiers. He came riding on a donkey. That was intentional. By design.

Jesus did it to fulfill the prophecy of one of the last of the Old Testament prophets, Zechariah, who gave this prophetic promise:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion!  
 Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!  
 See, your king comes to you,  
 Righteous and victorious,  
 Lowly and riding on a donkey,  
 On a colt, the foal of a donkey.

....

He will proclaim peace to the nations.  
 His rule will extend from sea to sea  
 And from the River to the ends of the earth.  
 (Zechariah 9:9, 10b)

Jesus was making a statement that day. A statement about Himself. Through the symbolism of riding a donkey, He was staking His claim to be the true King and Messiah, the promised Savior and Deliverer of God's people. Not the kind of king most people expected or hoped for. Not the military commander or political leader who would liberate the Jewish people from the grip of Rome. But one who would deliver all who trust in Him from their sins and give them the peace with God they would not and could not find anywhere else.

Not everyone was thrilled by this parade and the symbolic message Jesus was sending. As New Testament scholar Darrell Bock points out, it was a message that some people rejoiced in, others did not understand, and still others emphatically rejected (Darrell Bock, *Luke: The NIV Application Commentary*, 492).

Those who were hostile to Jesus – the Pharisees, in particular – wanted to arrest Jesus (John 11:57), but the popularity of Jesus prevented them from doing so. At least on this day. Their moment of opportunity would come soon enough.

Jesus came riding on a donkey, not as a conquering king, but as a humble, peace-making Messiah. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:14, Jesus Himself is our peace. And again, in Colossians 1:19-20, he says that God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him (Jesus), and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross. Write that truth on your heart. Better yet, let Jesus write it on your heart in His saving blood.

What is unique in Luke's account is the lament of Jesus over Jerusalem. What is it that makes Jesus so sad? What is it that brings Him such great grief? Is it the rejection, humiliation, forsakenness, suffering, and death He must endure in order to save sinners? No. He is ready and willing to undergo it all. What causes Him such grief is that Jerusalem (not everyone in Jerusalem, but many or most of its residents, especially its political and religious leaders) had missed the opportunity to receive God's blessing, God's peace, God's *shalom*. Israel has run out of time. Some Jews *will* believe the gospel and become followers of Jesus. Some Jerusalemites *will* experience the peace of God. But God's judgment on Jerusalem and its

leaders is inevitable and inescapable. They have crossed the line in their rejection of Jesus and their refusal to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Judgment *will* come. It *did* come some 40 years later, in 70 AD, when the city of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans. Just as Jesus said.

What grieved Jesus was that Jerusalem “did not recognize the time of God’s coming” to them (19:44) and either did not know or simply refused to embrace “the things that make for peace” (19:42).

What happened to Jerusalem and its inhabitants can happen to any society, any nation, any church, any culture, any people, who close their eyes and ears to the word of God and the things of God. It can happen here in America. Our nation deserves God’s judgment every bit as much as Jerusalem did in Jesus’ day. It is only by God’s mercy that it has not yet happened to us. But someday it may if we continue down the road our society is headed.

Which is why we long for God to send a great revival. Why we pray for God to bring revival and a new great spiritual awakening that will transform hearts and lives and homes and families and churches and communities and nations through the power of the gospel. Why we hope God will step in and turn many, many hearts back to Him.

It is not too late. Not yet. There is still time. There is still time to turn back to God. Still time for you and me. But, as was true for Jerusalem, the time will come when it is too late for us.

### **BEA’S STORY**

I want to tell you a story about a woman named Bea, whose life on earth came to an end just a couple weeks ago (March 25). She was almost 102 years old. I never met her, but Bea and her husband Bob (who preceded her in death a couple years ago) were dear friends of a dear friend of Mary Sue’s and her husband. Bob and Bea’s only child, their daughter, was killed in a car accident in her 20s. So, Bob and Bea “adopted” Mary Sue’s friend and her three sisters, showing love and kindness to them and their families in the decades since. Bob was a career Air Force officer. When he retired from the Air Force, Bob and Bea settled in Anna Maria Island, FL.

According to Mary Sue’s friend, Bea was “a classy woman who loved traveling and card playing.” Bea was “like (her) second mother,” she said. Bea could also be stubborn, especially when it came to spiritual matters. For years, Mary Sue’s friend and her husband prayed for Bea and tried to talk with her about the gospel, but she never seemed open or interested. They were deeply distressed that Bea would go into eternity without Jesus.

Before last Christmas, the husband of Mary Sue’s friend wrote Bea a letter, expressing their love for her and explaining the message of the gospel, with the hope that they could talk about it on an upcoming visit. They did talk about it on one visit. But there was no visible impact.

A few days before her death, Bea went into cardiac arrest. Her heart stopped beating. Emergency medical personnel tried 12 times – 12 times! – to get her heart to start beating again. On the 12<sup>th</sup> try, it worked. An evidence of God’s tender mercy.

A famous writer (William Saroyan) once said: “Everyone has to die, but I always thought an exception would be made in my case.” Wrong. Even if you make it to 101 as Bea did, there are no exceptions – unless Jesus comes back first.

But here is the thing about Bea’s story: After more than a century of life without knowing God, in the last week of her earthly life, days after being revived following the heart attack that stopped her heart, Bea said yes to Jesus and the gospel. She found peace with God. Just in time. She told Mary Sue’s friends: “I get it! I get it! God is so wonderful!” Which He is. On March 25, Bea was ushered into the loving presence of her Savior and ours.

I tell you this story for three reasons:

First, because it speaks to the patient, persevering, prevailing love of God for sinners like Bea and you and me. The Hound of Heaven loved and pursued Bea for 100 years, until she accepted the gift of salvation and peace with Him.

Second, Bea’s story is a reminder that even if you live to be 100 or more, the day will come when your life on earth is over, and you will meet God face to face. Few of us will live as long as Bea did. No one is guaranteed to live that long. So, there is an urgency about saying yes to Jesus, about believing the gospel and receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life, because you don’t know when it will be too late, just as it was finally too late for Jerusalem. God gave Bea almost 102 years. But you and I can’t count on that. Just think about Dwayne Haskins and his tragic death at the age of 24.

Third, Bea’s story illuminates the beauty and power of love. Not only God’s love for sinners, but the love of friends who know and love Jesus, and their loving concern not only for Bea’s earthly comfort but also her eternal destiny and their desire for her salvation.

Maybe there is someone in your life who needs to be loved with that kind of love. Maybe there is someone in whose life God wants to use you to help them “get” the gospel like Bea did. Whatever you do, don’t give up. Don’t. Give. Up. You never know when that “someone” will “get it” as Bea did, and say yes to Jesus.

By God’s grace, Bea found and experienced the peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7). Nothing compares with this peace that God gives to those who trust in Him. My prayer is that you may have peace with God and know the peace of God in your life today and always.

## **PEACE BLOCKERS**

This may seem like an abrupt transition, but I want to shift gears and talk about three peace-blockers that can rob you of God's peace in your life, the way a blocked artery can prevent blood from flowing from your heart to different parts of your body.

### **Worry**

The first is worry. Oswald Chambers described worry as a mosquito that can irritate your whole life, keeping you from rest in God. You know how irritating mosquitos or gnats can be. Worry is like that.

Or maybe you can relate to what another Christian leader (Fred Smith) said: "Trying to break away from my worries was like wrestling an octopus." Have you ever tried to wrestle an octopus? Not me. And I hope I never do.

Whether it's more like a mosquito or an octopus, worry is a peace blocker. As Corrie Ten Boom said, worry doesn't empty tomorrow of its trouble, it empties today of its strength.

You know what Jesus says on the subject of worry. He says: "Don't!" (See Matthew 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-31.) Worry accomplishes nothing productive and can sap the life out of you.

The answer to worry – the antidote to anxiety – is prayer, prayer as an expression of faith, of trust in God and His gracious rule.

Philippians 4:6 says: "Don't be anxious about *anything*, but in *everything*, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." And the result? Verse 7 says: "*The peace of God*, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

*The Message* says: "Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness ... will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life."

When you are anxious or feel inclined to worry, invite Jesus into the situation that is worrying you. Let His peace displace worry at the center of your life. Don't let worry rob you of God's peace.

### **Envy**

Envy can rob you of God's peace as well.

Do you remember the story of Mozart, the musical genius, as told from the perspective of Antonio Salieri? It is told in the play and movie *Amadeus*, which was Mozart's middle name.

Salieri was the court musician in Vienna in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. He worked hard, writing nice melodies, fine choral works, and good instrumental pieces. He knew he had been blessed by God. As a young man he had prayed fervently to God: “Let me make music that will glorify You, Father. Help me lift the hearts of people to heaven. Let me serve You through my music.” A noble, God-honoring prayer.

Then, along came Mozart, the boy wonder. He dazzled the crowds, playing music as if it were second nature to him. Complex melodies came from his dancing fingers. His songs soared until they seemed to bring heaven right down to earth.

But Mozart was a brazen sinner. He was immature, immoral, obnoxious, vulgar, and obscene. And everybody knew it.

Salieri grew green with envy. How could God be so unfair? He (Salieri) was God’s servant. Why should Mozart be blessed with such extraordinary talent? Salieri lived a pious, upstanding life. Why should Mozart enjoy all these worldly pleasures and still get ahead? Salieri worked so hard at his music. Why should it all come so easily to Mozart?

These are not easy questions. The story continues until Mozart dies a mysterious death at the age of 35. Salieri’s eyes gleam. But, in the dramatic climax, Salieri sits in an insane asylum where he curses God for denying him the kind of talent Mozart had.

Envy really is a monster. It can destroy you. Don’t let it rob you of the peace of God in your life. Don’t waste your life comparing yourself to someone else or wishing for what someone else has. Accept the place in life God has given you. Be the best *you* you can be. And learn, as Paul did, the secret of contentment in any and every situation by keeping your eyes on Jesus (Philippians 4:11-12).

### **Unforgiveness**

A third thing that will rob you of God’s peace is unforgiveness.

Has someone done something to hurt or offend you? Something that has caused a rift in your relationship? It happens to everybody.

If you are unwilling to forgive, it will weigh you down. It will eat away at you. It will prevent you from having God’s peace in your life. It will affect not only your relationship with that other person but your relationship with God as well.

Someone once said to John Wesley: “I never forgive.” To which Wesley replied: “Then I hope you never sin.”

Why would he say that? Because Jesus says in Matthew 6, in the Sermon on the Mount, that if you hold onto a grudge and refuse to forgive others when they sin against you, you will cut yourself off from the forgiveness of God (6:15). And without forgiveness, there is no peace with God.

This is serious stuff! Sometimes (usually) it is another person you need to forgive. Sometimes it is yourself. Forgiving yourself can be the hardest thing to do, even if you know you have been forgiven by God. Sometimes it is easier to forgive someone else than to forgive yourself. Sometimes you can be harder on yourself than God is on you. But do you hear how silly that sounds? If God has forgiven you, there is no one you can't forgive. Including yourself.

An unforgiving spirit, whether an unwillingness to forgive someone else or the inability to forgive yourself, will block the flow of God's peace in your life.

One final thought:

### **THE OUTWARD DIMENSION**

We have talked about peace in 3-D. Three dimensions: Upward (peace with God), Inward (the peace of God in your inner being), and Outward (peace with others). The outward dimension is the most tricky one, because it isn't always possible to live in peace and harmony with others. Jesus calls us to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). Psalm 34:14 instructs us to "seek peace and pursue it." But peace with others is not always possible. Just ask the people of Ukraine. It is not possible to be at peace with someone who is trying to destroy you.

It takes two to tango and it takes two to have peace. The Bible is totally realistic about this. Romans 12:18 says: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

It is *not* always possible here on earth. You are *not* responsible for the actions of others. But you *are* responsible to do what you can to pursue the things that make for peace (Romans 14:19). As it says in Hebrews 12:14, we are to "make every effort to live at peace with all people." But we have to face the fact that peace is not always possible. And God does not call us to seek peace at any price. There is, as it says in Ecclesiastes 3:8, a time for war and a time for peace.

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Do not run the risk of missing out on God's peace by rejecting Him or refusing His grace today. Do not allow worry or envy or unforgiveness or any other sin to rob you of the peace of God in your life. As far as it depends on you, do what leads to peace.

The fruit of the spirit is peace. May you have this fruit in increasing abundance.

Lord, let it be so in us, to the praise and glory of Your name. Amen.