

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

There once was a King who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried. The King looked at all the pictures, but there were only two he really liked and he had to choose between them.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror, for peaceful towering mountains were all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky from which rain fell and in which lightening played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This did not look peaceful at all. But when the King looked, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest... perfect peace.

Which picture do you think won the prize?

The King chose the second picture. "Because," explained the King, "peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace."<sup>i</sup>

Would you have chosen the same painting as the king did in our story above? Or would you have gone for the first painting? I think I may have chosen the first painting. It's a picture of a postcard we might purchase at one our national parks or have been so fortunate to capture after an early morning hike or while watching the sun slowly disappear on the horizon leaving brilliant shades of red dancing across a serene lake.

Our family is planning a trip to Glacier National Park this summer and part of me is in search of that peace presented in the first picture. My own early morning hike that traverses up the mountainside until I come around a bend or ascend that final stretch to the top and encounter a vision of the turquoise waters of lake hundreds of feet below tucked ever so perfectly at the base of mountains formed many millennia ago.

One of my favorite television channels to watch is HGTV (Home & Garden TV). Specifically, I love shows in which people are searching to buy a home alongside the sandy beaches of an ocean, in the Caribbean, on a remote island, or alongside the shoreline of a remote lake. Perhaps, it's a longing (or wishful thinking) I have to one day be able to live alongside a body of water. When I watch these shows there seems to be a common theme often said by those seeking these beachside homes. So many frequently state they are looking for their own piece of paradise. That is, a place to escape their daily lives, the stresses of their jobs, the hectic pace

of the larger towns and cities they flee from on the weekend to a small parcel of land in which peace is possible.

Is peace possible in our lives? Aside from purchasing our own remote place of paradise with a stretch of sandy beach or a mountain view or a million miles from nowhere. I am not saying that peace isn't possible in these places because I know firsthand the rest and relaxation, I get from taking time away and going to places such as this. However, this peace is temporary and fleeting. Beachside homes often give way to tempestuous winds, rising waters, and crashing waves. Even the continual barrage of salt laden mist from the sea can eventually wear down those havens of peace we erect for ourselves. Mountainside vistas often succumb to forest fires or landslides. The world has a way of interrupting even the most peaceful of places we try to erect and create for ourselves. Vacations end and we are smack dab in the middle of the life we left behind for a week or two.

Is peace possible in our lives? Perhaps, it is trying to answer this question that set my gaze on the second painting and the one the king selected. Peace is possible even in our world that seems to spin out of control. Peace is possible even in our lives in which the rain falls, the lightning strikes and thunder rolls, and the mountains are rugged and bare. Peace is possible behind the torrent of crashing water that cascades around us ready at times to pull us into its powerful current. That peace is represented by the mothering bird resting gently upon her well-built nest.

In John's gospel that peace is none other than the peace Jesus gives. It is the peace of God, along with the Son, coming to us and making their home in us. It is a peace, as we heard last week, rooted in the love of God. Jesus tells his disciples that peace is possible in their lives. Peace is possible even after the powers of the world try to instill peace through different means – by sentencing Jesus to die upon a cross. Peace is possible in the torrent of grief and fear they will encounter after he has gone. Peace is possible even when the world will seek to thwart the message of love, they try to proclaim in the name of Jesus Christ by silencing their voices and ending their lives. Peace is possible, here and now, Jesus tells them because he will not abandon them. The promised Holy Spirit will come upon them and abide in them.

They will encounter this peace through the love they share for one another. I believe it is in this love with one another we encounter the word made flesh. The risen Christ makes himself known and the peace which he promises we will have in this messy world will manifest itself. Peace is possible because we have been grafted into the loving peace of a relationship with the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is not a peace we can purchase. This is not a peace we can obtain on our own. This is a peace solely given to us by the grace of God. By the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Through the self-giving love of our Lord and Savior.

Peace is possible in the world today. Beyond the rugged and bare mountaintops that surround us. Amid the angry skies and thunderous storms that blow through our lives. Behind the foaming waterfalls that often engulf us. There is peace. There is Christ. There is love. There is a relationship like none other. For the promise is as sure today as it was all those many years ago Jesus uttered those words to his first disciples, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” It is this indwelling of Father and Son that makes the second promise in this text possible, “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.”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://storiesforpreaching.com/category/sermonillustrations/peace/>