

The Reverend Shelley Ryan  
St. Luke's Episcopal Church ~ Anchorage, Kentucky  
17th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 20) September 20th, 2015  
James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a, Mark 9:30-37

Peace.... How would you define peace? How do you go about experiencing feeling a sense of peace? I suppose each of us has a thought, or an idea, as to how or where we might experience peace. However, this can often prove to be a challenging task at times. We live in a society that inundates us with a copious amount of external stimuli, which often exposes us, to crisis and instability occurring throughout the globe, and within our own communities. It's enough to make you a little crazy at times, or at least beg the question "What's happening in this world of ours?" It's easy to become overwhelmed, restless, or even cynical, as we may feel a sense of helplessness while the media reveals disturbing reports and images on the front page of a newspaper, or across the television or computer screen. Again, we may find ourselves asking "What is happening?" Will there ever be peace in this world?"

Just as we experience disorder and turmoil in our world today, there was also disorder and turmoil when Jesus walked the earth. But take heart, Jesus has overcome the world. In the midst of chaos and uncertainty, the worldly things tend to exert a downward pull on our thoughts, which can cause us to feel a sense of hopelessness or disillusionment. When this occurs our focus is not on Christ. We become world-focused rather than Christ- focused, and we find ourselves becoming weighed down by the happenings (worries) of the world. But when we seek His face, and commune with Christ through prayer and discernment, we can know His presence, and His Spirit will fill our minds with hope and peace freeing us from the burdens of this world.

It is often when we experience great difficulty in our lives that we most deeply yearn to draw nearer to Christ, with the hope and expectation of experiencing his presence, his hope, and

his peace. So how, you may ask do I find this peace? We have been granted free will, and we have the choice to ascribe to the wisdom of the world, which often leads to strife and discontent, or ascribe to the wisdom from above, which is - as James puts it "pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy." In yielding to this wisdom from above we are able to find peace and accord with our neighbors.

Sometimes, in order for us to receive this heavenly wisdom, and experience peace, it is often necessary for us to step away from worldly distractions and quiet our minds. This is often easier said than done in a world that often commands our attention, but this is where the act of discernment comes in to play. The act of discerning can be defined as determining God's desire in a situation or for one's life. Although, there is no guarantee that the God's will, or the way of the Holy Spirit can be discerned in any given situation, Ignatius of Loyola, a sixteenth century priest, theologian, and founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) managed to come up with a method that has been used for centuries, that counters self-deception and heightens the fortuity that God's Spirit can be known. According to author Frank Rogers - discernment, for Ignatius, was to enhance one's participation in the work of God, for the glory of God and the healing of the world. Rogers highlights the following three principles that are integral in adhering to discernment with honesty; 1) A passionate commitment to follow God 2) An attitude of indifference toward all other drives or desires, and 3) A deep sensitivity to the ways and being of God, which is accomplished through prayer, reading, meditating on the scriptures, worship, and faithful acts of mercy and justice." By engaging in the practice of discernment and prayer, we open hearts and minds and focus our energies on wisdom from above.

There are many beautiful and powerful ways that we can engage in to further enhance our ability to commune with God through prayer. In the Episcopal tradition the Book of

Common Prayer offers various liturgies, prayers, and daily offices that can enrich personal worship through the rhythm of daily prayer and worship. I encourage you to take a look at the offices of Morning Prayer, noonday prayer, evening prayer, and the ancient office of Compline, or night prayer, which is the final office of the day. In doing this you may well discover a newly enriched prayer life.

Some might say that prayer is the pathway to peace, as when we pray we commune with God. Several years ago Television anchor, Dan Rather, whom most of you likely remember, held a rare interview with Mother Teresa. Mr. Rather asked her “What do you say during your prayers? She answered, “I listen.” Mr. Rather shifted the question and asked “Well then, what does God say? Mother Teresa looked at him, smiled, and responded “He listens.” Surely, she had experienced the wisdom that comes from above.

So I ask you again – how do we find peace? We find peace through discernment and prayer, as when we cultivate a healthy and disciplined prayer life, we will discover an enhanced ability to experience the closeness of God. And when we feel the closeness of God, we naturally feel his peace – the peace that surpasses all understanding that will illuminate us with an overflowing sense of joy, that encourages us to share this sense of joy and peace with others. It is this peace that can rise us above worldly burdens, with the knowingness that God is in control. Acquiring a disciplined life of prayer does not come easy, and indeed it shouldn’t, but the precious reward that we will receive is wisdom from above that surpasses all that we can ever ask or imagine. “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

