

Lesson: Philippians 4:1-9  
The Gospel: Matthew 22:1-14

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
October 11, 2020

“Peace of Mind”  
Sermon Preached by Lowell D. Nelson  
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Praise to you, O dear Lord, who brings the word to life to bring us into relationship and to give us confidence for a future of hope.

Peace of mind, I’ve heard that phrase used as a selling technique, to make a decision that allows you a peace of mind to make a purchase, perhaps, of an insurance product or a final resting place or some other decision that may seem like it's far off, but it gives you confidence now that you have peace of mind, and that may be comfortable, but that is insufficient to describe the peace of mind that comes through the love of God through Jesus Christ, and that is a gift for now and forever, and who does not want more peace of mind in these days, these pandemic days, where we are struggling to plan ahead and concerned about the present and wondering if things will return to some sense of normalcy? I think this is the perfect time for the stresses that we are feeling as the people of God and the people of this country and the people of this world as we strive to find a peace that is not simply a cognitive restructuring technique, using that term from my social work background, just think differently. No, it's actually the presence of God in our life that brings a peace that passes all understanding.

We began today with the reading from Psalm 23. What a beautiful Psalm. I hear this often as the request for a funeral or memorial service. It brings a sense of peace to know that the person being laid to rest has known this Psalm, and we, the living, it brings a sense of peace to know these basics of God's presence in our life as a shepherd with absolutely no cares or wants that the Lord cannot provide, providing leadership in our life and making us lie down and leading us in life and restoring our souls. And it is so powerful, because it's not just in those momentary beautiful times, but it's also in the midst, as it says in the Psalm, through the valley of the shadow of death. There is no separation with the presence of God's love in our life, and even though we may feel it, we reclaim it. We come back to this Psalm. We understand the Lord's presence. Isn't it interesting, even in the presence of enemies, is the Lord's presence, protecting, guiding, comforting? And then this statement of faith, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Now that is peace.

The Gospel for today is one of those Gospels that I would say, if you did a survey of pastors, we'd rather preach about a different Gospel, because it has complexities to it. The book of Matthew, written to a Jewish audience primarily, of course useful for all people, but trying to make sense of something that was so devastating for the people of Jerusalem and the Jewish folks that were following Christ, which was the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. This was written after that, and so it's trying to bring into context about how can this be destruction of the capital, destruction of the place of faith? And so, this analogy that's bringing us the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God would be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. This begins the story about people who are too busy or disinterested in coming to a wedding banquet, and there is great discord as the invitation itself is treated with disdain, and the people who give the invitation are treated with disdain and harm. It resets, then, in another broad invitation and for the people of our faith, known as Gentiles back in those days, but people that the invitation of God's love through Jesus Christ came cascading forward is absolutely to our benefit that everyone has been invited to the wedding banquet, the good and the bad, everyone. This statement is true. It is for everyone to be invited into this presence of God.

One word of a story behind the story which is this the strange understanding of the wedding robe. Why was a person who did not wear a wedding robe treated so harshly? The idea is that each person, in this time, was given a robe to wear, one to show the commonality of the joy that all were part of this great festival known as a wedding. It also had a beautiful practical effect, that as each person wore an external garment no one could tell their status in life. Their clothes underneath would not give any clues. Were they rich? Were they poor? All were invited. All were common because they were there to celebrate the wedding. And so, this understanding of the robe, theologically, comes enticed by Isaiah 61, for God has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness. This is the gift of Jesus Christ, putting on Christ's love for you and I. This cloth, this clothing, this exterior is more than that. It is the absolute blessed gift of God's love for us, God's righteousness covering us, not our own righteousness, and so as this poor person was stymied how did he get in. Did he come over the wall or did he think that his clothes were too good? Who knows what the impact was upon his life, but this is the thing, what I want to emphasize for you and I - encouragement to live deeply and dig deeply into this faith life.

Let me give you this as the example. The Philippians text is absolutely fantastic. It is the hallmark of the presence of God in our life. It uses two people just to say that they were having a conflict, Euodia and Syntyche, two women. They were having conflict. Imagine that, a church that had people in conflict with one another. It is the dimension of life that we as people have conflict, but there's encouragement there. Help these people

because we struggle for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is what the community of faith is about is to strengthen and encourage one another through these words - **rejoice**. Joy comes in the morning. To rejoice is again and again to remember the glory of God. Again, I say rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone because the Lord is near. The Lord is at hand for us as people of faith, the Lord is within the gift of the Holy Spirit and we as the temple for the Holy Spirit. What beautiful advice. What beautiful recommendation for a peace of mind. Do not worry about anything. Let me repeat this, Paul's recommendation to the people of Philippi and Paul's recommendation through the word of God to you and I. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. Luther said it in a pithy way, "Pray and let God worry." Wouldn't that be an amazing way to have peace of mind - is everything that brings discord to your mind, you treat it as an automatic invitation to prayer? Oh, I'm worrying. Oh, this is an invitation to prayer. Let me bring this to God's attention to let me share the impact of my heart and to give it to God, and what God brings back will be a peace of mind that surpasses all understanding. That hits me. I like to understand how things are working. It's insufficient. I can't understand how everything works together, but I can understand the peace of God when I give it to the Lord as He guards our hearts and our minds.

And then this encouragement for peace of mind, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, pure, pleasing, and commendable, anything of excellence, anything worthy of praise - think about these things. I don't know about you, but if I engage in media, written, that which is on the TV, that's what is on the internet. I just pray that our worship service is an example of this of worthy of attention. There's plenty of impulses to see those things which are absolutely opposite of this. It's so human, right? You see an accident; you slow down to look at it more clearly. It's just a travesty of our culture and of our style, but it is not without this statement of all things that are excellent in the love of God. Think about these things and then keep on doing the things, as Paul says, that you have learned, received, heard, and seen. I just go back to this. The person who came in without a wedding garment missed the main message. The love of the host, the wedding groom, the love of the king was meant to bring him into community. He thought he probably had to do it on his own. What a mistake, but there is still yet hope for all of us that we rely upon the presence of God and to think about the things that bring honor and glory to God and to practically use our lives that when we worry it's an immediate opportunity for prayer. Worry does not beget more worrying. Worry allows you to jump in and move into a prayerful response, to think about these things with by prayer and supplication, praying with earnestness, that your life means something to God, which it absolutely does. So, let me say this. To know God is to know this peace because it is more than a cognitive restructuring. It is the absolute presence of God, God's love for you and for me, and from this foundation of life God is more than just a

concept. God is truly alive with us, for us, within us, allows a sense of peace and a sense of missional movement no matter where our enemies are with us or where we are struggling ourselves. It is a peace that passes all understanding, and it is the gift of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.