

Reflections on Faith and Life for November 15, 2020

Rejoice in the Lord always! I'll say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all people. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer, and with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

The *peace which passes understanding* doesn't have to wait till we have all the answers before it enters our lives. "Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!" is the prayer of a worried father whose son is "demon-possessed." Jesus was engaged in conversation with the father, who said, "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." It sounds as if Jesus was a little bit miffed; look at his answer: "If you can? Everything is possible for those who believe." And the man responded, "Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!"

Those words are part of my daily devotions. Daily. *Every day*. At age 73-1/2, after 21 years of ordained ministry, I still pray that God will "help my unbelief." These reflections were prompted by a page in my *Disciplines* (Upper Room Books), entitled "In the Meantime. . ." That, my friends, is where we live: in the meantime. In the "already-but-not-yet," this time between when Jesus has **already** defeated the powers of sin, death, and the devil, but this world has **not yet** come to its end. Jesus died for our sins and we are redeemed for eternity—but we still have to live out our lives until the day when "he shall come again to judge the living and the dead" (from the Creed).

Our **not yet** often feels like a not-so-good place to be. But we need to remember that Jesus is with us in our darkness, in the seeming chaos that surrounds us; he's among us in the COVID crisis; he grieves with those who grieve and yearns for us to yoke ourselves to him: ***Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*** (Matthew 11:28-30).

Yes, Jesus wants each of us to come to him for strength and peace. But at the same time, to those who are able to "suck it up and get over it" (a phrase we learned in Pastoral Counseling in seminary), he basically says this: "You're Christians! Act like it. Be who you are: *sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever!* Don't let your anxiety or fear hide the truth of my power in your life. Quit moping, quit feeling sorry for yourself. Get back on your feet and live in the light!" **Claim** the peace of God that transcends all understanding!

Here's the end of the passage we started with: ***Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, or right, or pure, or lovely, whatever is admirable or excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me (Paul), put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you*** (Philippians 4:8-9).

God IS with you, always. Not always perceived or felt or recognized. But the promise of Jesus at the end of Matthew's gospel is: ***Remember, I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.*** Try to remember this! And when things are difficult, remember to pray, ***“Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!”***