

McCabe United Methodist Church

Peace with God (Part 1)

(Based on Billy Graham's book *Peace with God*)

Jeremiah 29:10-14 * Matthew 7:13-14: March 8 & 9, 2014

Pastor Rick Fossum

Some of you might remember Florence Kollman. She was quite the lady. Every Tuesday morning, following the *Sojourners Bible Study*, Florence would come to my office and critique Sunday's message. She did it in a kind and loving and playful way and I appreciated her many visits.

Anyway, Florence gave me a book. The book is called *Peace With God* by Billy Graham. On the inside cover Florence had written, "**For Pastor Rick Fossum. God bless you.**" And then she added or hinted, "**Wonderful topics for sermons.**" And then she further hinted, "**Each chapter.**" I had the strong suspicion that Florence was trying to get me to preach from this book.

Florence was right. The book is treasure of ideas and topics. The sad part is that it would take me over a year to preach on each chapter. Instead, this morning, I'm starting a new series called *Peace With God* and it's based on Billy Graham's book, but instead of using all the chapters, I'll be focusing on a few, but borrowing from many.

So Florence, and I know you are watching, I hope you don't mind.

By the way, Billy Graham wrote the book in 1953 and it was republished in 1983. That makes it over sixty years old. The times have changed during these past sixty years and the world has changed, but the basics of this book have not changed and this why I'm using it for my Lenten series.

During each Lenten message, I'll be using the Billy Graham formula. The formula goes like this:

1. God has a plan for us
2. We don't follow God's plan
3. God has a solution to the problem
4. Our response

As you know, I'm not Billy Graham. I have enough trouble being me without trying to be someone I'm not, but this is my promise: I promise you that I'll do my best to preach from Mr. Graham's book, but I'll sound like Rick Fossum. It's my hope that you'll find this series not only interesting, but also life-changing.

Peace With God. A doctor surveyed his patients one time. As they waited in the waiting room to see the doctor, they were given a survey to fill out. One of the questions asked was this one: "**What is your number one wish?**"

I'll give you a minute to answer that question yourself. What is your number one wish?

According to the doctor's informal survey, 67% of his patients answered, "**Our number one wish is to have peace of mind.**"

Peace of mind. Was that your answer? How would you describe peace of mind or *Peace With God*?

An art school held a contest. They asked their students to paint a picture that best describes peace for them. One student painted a deer and a fawn grazing together in a quiet meadow surrounded by pine trees stretching toward heaven. Another student painted a cat curled up in a basket, resting as only cats can do.

But the first place prize went to a student who painted a violent waterfall with the water crashing down on the rocks below. The sky was dark with a single lightning bolt shattering the darkness. And the wind was blowing and rain was coming down in sheets. In the middle of all this, there was a tree branch that extended over the rocks and water and in the tree branch was a nest. And safely within the nest was a mother and her two babies . . . at peace with the world.

I think peace is something like that. Peace is being in harmony with ourselves and with God in spite of the world around us.

In the Garden of Eden, God had a plan. God created a paradise for Adam and Eve. God wanted them to enjoy their new home. God wanted

them to be at peace with themselves and with God. There was just one little stipulation . . . don't eat the fruit from a certain tree.

This is how it is with us. God wants us to have peace, *Peace With God* and there's just one little stipulation . . . "*follow me,*" God says, "*follow me.*"

In Jeremiah, we heard this promise from God: **"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart."**

And in Matthew Jesus tells us, **"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."**

I believe that having *Peace With God* and following Jesus Christ are related. In fact, I don't think you can have the one without the other.

The problem with God's plan is this: God lets us decide. God lets us choose. If we want to move to the Rocky Mountains, find a cave and live off the land, God isn't going to stop us. It's our choice.

In the Garden of Eden, God said to Adam and Eve. "You have a choice. **You can choose to live here in paradise and enjoy all the fruit and benefits that life has to offer. I'll be your God and you will be my children.**

Or," God went on, **"You can choose not to listen to me. You can choose to make your own way through life, but you will have no Peace With God.**

Poor Adam and Eve. They thought they knew better than God. They choose to do the one thing that God warned them about not doing.

We've been doing the same thing ever since. We can choose to follow Jesus or not. No else can make this decision for us. But know this, *Peace With God* is found only by choosing to follow Jesus.

St. Augustine once said, "*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.*"

Some of you are teachers, some of you work in sales, some work with your hands and some work with words and ideas and numbers. Some of you are students. Some of you are retired. Whatever we do, we're not going to find *Peace With God* until our hearts and minds rest with Christ.

There's nothing wrong with the careers we have chosen for ourselves, but if we're expecting that the money we earn or the power that we receive or the glamor and prestige that goes along with our work . . . if we're expecting these things to bring us peace, we're not going to find it. We'll keep looking and looking for peace, but we won't find it until we turn to Jesus and invite him into our lives.

Two thousand years ago, God sent Jesus Christ into our world to not only die for our sins, but also to show us how to live better lives now. He set an example for us to follow. He made it possible for us to put behind us our fears and anxieties, our shame and guilt. He made it possible for us to live new, better lives including *Peace With God*.

Do you remember Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker? They were televangelists with their own TV show called the *PTL Club*. They had millions of viewers. They wrote books and recorded albums and sold Bibles. They were worth millions. They had it all except *Peace With God*.

It all fell apart for them in 1987 when it was revealed that the PTL Club had paid \$287,000 to a young woman by the name of Jessica Hahn to keep her quiet about her sexual encounters she had with Jim Bakker. That revelation led to an investigation.

Eventually, Jim Bakker was convicted of fraud and conspiracy and sentenced to forty-five years in prison.

The Bakkers had everything except *Peace With God*. Not long ago, Jim Bakker wrote a book called "*I Was Wrong*." In the book, he admits not only to moral failure, but he also acknowledges that he led people astray with his self-serving theology. In prison, Bakker came to the point where he repented of his sins, turned to the Christ he had often told others about, and finally found the peace which had eluded him.

Are you looking for peace, *Peace With God*? Are you looking for a way to fill the emptiness of your heart? Are you looking for something that will take away your fears and anxieties? Your shame and guilt? Are you looking for something that will help you to discover a purpose and meaning for your life?

I invite you today, to come forward and commit or recommit your life to Jesus Christ. Jesus made it clear to us that you and I are accepted, forgiven and loved Just as We Are. Coming forward is our way of accepting this gift that we've been given.

Our last hymn today is the one Billy Graham used to end all of us revivals. It's called *Just as I Am*. I invite you to come forward as we sing this hymn and stand or kneel before the cross and ask Jesus to come into your life.

If you'd like, I'll say a prayer with you. Jesus tell us, "*Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*" This is the beginning of *Peace With God*. I invite you now, as we sing *Just as I Am* to come forward.