

“At peace and Unafraid / My peace I leave with you”

Sermon for Peace Sunday #4, TUMC, November 10, 2024 Tim Schmucker  
Micah 4: 1–4 and John 14: 1–31 (excerpts)

**It happened Friday September 27, six weeks ago.** The day before, we the Preaching Team had set the schedule for our annual four-Sunday Peacemaking series. I agreed to preach today—the fourth and last Sunday. And it happened the next morning, at 6am. I was making a long espresso. The grinding beans and the coffee aroma were starting to rouse me from my usual just-woke-up-pre-java fog. I was thinking about nothing. Just my early morning coffee ritual.

Then suddenly my being was filled with an awareness of what this sermon would consist of. My thoughts overflowed with the theme and even the two scripture passages. Believe me; I hadn't been pondering this future sermon. It wasn't on my radar screen at all. But boom, there it was. I received this sermon as a gift. A gift.

It's been a **challenging gift** because I have never preached a peace sermon like this before. *“My peace I leave with you. Not the world's peace. Let not your hearts be troubled.”* Now, I have preached many peace and justice sermons over the decades here at TUMC. So many that one Sunday morning around 18 years ago, I was to preach and one of you said to me as we greeted each other in the lobby before the service, “So what peace issue are you going to confront us with today?” You know who you are! Preaching about justice and peace as the core of Jesus' gospel is a familiar experience for me.

For example, I've preached at least twice over the decades on the glorious **prophetic vision of a world at peace**. It's in both Isaiah and Micah. I invite you to go back in time with me. 2,800 years. All the way back to the late 8th century BCE. Close your eyes, if that helps you imagine. The scent of dust

and dried earth hangs thick in the air, the heat is pressing down. And the Israelites are under extreme pressure. The mighty Assyrian Empire to the northeast has already swallowed up the Northern Kingdom of Israel, leaving the southern Kingdom of Judah with fear and frayed nerves.

Judah itself is fractured—but not by war, but rather by greed. Wealthy elites seize land from the poor, creating an economic chasm where the powerless suffer under the weight of injustice. Corruption runs rampant among leaders and judges, and the official prophets have become complicit subservients. Self-interest has replaced their covenant with God to care for each other. For the common people, life is bleak, marked by exploitation and poverty.

Into this dusty grimy world steps Micah, denouncing this moral decay with the courageous voice of a true prophet and calling Judah back to their covenant with God. And Micah also speaks of hope—a vision of the world at peace, where swords are turned into plowshares, and nations no longer learn war."

**In the days to come**, many nations will say:

“Come, let’s go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
**so that God may teach us their ways** and we may walk in God’s paths!”

And they will **beat their swords into iron plows** and their spears into pruning tools.

Nations **will no longer learn how to make war**.

All will sit underneath their own grapevines, under their own fig trees. — **At peace and unafraid!**

Let’s return to the present.... At peace and unafraid. But, **how can we be at peace when the world is at war?** When the nations are still making war

against each other? When the powerful marginalise the weak? When a misogynist racist convicted felon is elected President of the US? When mothers and children die daily in Gaza from US-financed weapons? When children go to bed with empty stomachs and worse die of malnutrition in Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, and Chad? When guns, bombs and missiles proliferate? Much of humanity is NOT at peace and unafraid. Micah's glorious vision is just that—a dream for the future.

**The community of the Gospel of John also lived in anxious, fear-filled times.** Let's go back again, this time only 2,000 years, to the late first century CE, about 60 years after Jesus' ministry and crucifixion. Close your eyes, if you wish. The community of the Gospel of John is a group of Jewish followers of Jesus, but they find themselves isolated. First of all, the Roman empire destroyed the Jews' glorious temple about 20 years before, and since then Jewish leaders have been working to preserve Jewish identity under oppressive Roman rule. Do you hear the heavy footsteps of Roman soldiers patrolling the streets, their armor clinking with each step? Can you feel the undertone of anxiety and fear?

And secondly, the community of John's Gospel believes deeply in Jesus as the Messiah. So much so, that they've been aggressively proselytising their fellow congregants in their synagogue. But now have become *aposynagōgos*—cast out of their synagogue. Even though they still consider themselves Jews, they've been excluded from the religious, social, and economic heart of their faith community. This isn't just a theological disagreement; it's a loss of family, livelihood, and belonging. They have lost their home. Pain and trauma permeate their daily lives.

Let's return to the present. **Today at TUMC we are hearing the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John**, a gospel written by that community and for

them. Jesus is facing his crucifixion. And he consoles them. Reassures them. Comforts them. Picture the scene. Jesus is in the upper room with his confused and fear-filled disciples. They don't understand what Jesus is saying. "Why are you leaving us? No, we don't know where you are going." Listen to Jesus' words to this community who has lost so much and for whom uncertainty permeates their daily lives:

**Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me.** My Father's house has room to spare. I'm going to prepare a place for you. Then I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am, you will be also.

**God will send another Companion, who will be with you forever.** This Companion is the Spirit of Truth. You know them, because they live with you and will be with you. **I won't leave you as orphans. I will come to you.** The Companion, the Holy Spirit, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you.

**Peace, I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don't be troubled or afraid.**

His peace, Jesus says, is not the peace that the world gives. In Jesus' time and the time of the Johannine community, peace the world provided was **Pax Romana**—a so-called peace enforced by Roman military might. No, the peace Jesus leaves this community is a peace rooted in **trusting God**.

**Jesus' words speak to us also**, as we in the TUMC community of faith have much to be anxious about, even to fear.

In addition to war and suffering in our world, perhaps we also experience deep angst about the global climate crisis. If you do, take a moment to feel that anxiety. Or picture someone you know who experiences climate anxiety. Some young adults very close to me are convinced humanity

will become extinct before they grow old. They live daily with this reality. **And yet Jesus says “Don’t be afraid.”**

Perhaps we also worry daily about family members—relationships, lives, mental health. Our parents and siblings. Our children and grandchildren. Our life partners, in the present or one we hope for in the future. Picture them. **And Jesus reminds us that we can trust in God.**

Some of us may be anxious about our personal finances—the cost of housing, of living. How to acquire or maintain a decent job and secure income. If this isn’t you, hold in your heart someone who is anxious about this. **And Jesus says “God is with you.”**

Many of us are apprehensive about politics—whether local, provincial, national, or south of the border. Perhaps you experience profound angst about the growing normalisation of divisive rhetoric and personal slander in our parliament. Or the hate in Canadian society that exhibits as racism, homophobia, antisemitism and islamophobia. **And Jesus says “Don’t be troubled.”**

Recently I’ve been thinking a lot about retirement and ageing. I’m quite nervous at times. Growing older can bring a cascade of anxieties, especially around health and perhaps financial stability in retirement. Confronting the inevitable realities of aging can cause much angst. I’m grateful for elders in this congregation who’ve modeled how to embrace growing old with grace, serenity and trust.

With so much weighing heavily on us, with plenty of reasons not to be at peace, Jesus’ parting words to the Johannine community speak to us—here and today: Peace, I leave with you. My peace I give you. Don’t be troubled or afraid. Trust in God. **Jesus is echoing the First Testament:** The Torah, Psalms, and the prophets. Three examples:

**In the Torah: Deuteronomy 31:** "The Lord God's self goes before you and will be with you; God will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged".

**Psalm 23:** "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will not fear, for you are with me; you comfort me".

**The prophet Isaiah 41:** "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my right hand."

**Trusting God—it's more than** words in a sermon, It's more than a passing feeling. It's more than a concept in our heads, although I confess to you that for much of my adult life, trusting God was mostly an abstract concept. Trusting the Eternal One, I have been learning, becomes a core life anchor, a confidence we feel in our gut, and it fills our being with peace even when everything around us trembles. This trust in God was core to the faith of Jesus, our brother and guide. This is why Paul says in Romans 3 that we are saved by the same faith that Jesus had, a faith exemplified by his trust in God, the parent. We are saved by the same trust and faithfulness *of* Jesus.

**God as mother and father is a primary metaphor** throughout scripture. Tragically not everyone has had trust-worthy mothers and fathers. Still, imagine the embrace of a mother or mothering figure who will never ever let go, a father or father-figure who holds his child close even when everything else is crumbling. That is God's love for us—a love that won't leave us as orphans. We parents know that we will do anything for our children's well-being, even give up our lives. So we can trust Mother God, Father God, just as we trust our parents.

**Yet, trusting doesn't always come easy.** There are numerous techniques and spiritual practices that help us reduce anxiety, fear and stress

in our lives. From mindfulness and meditation to contemplative prayer and scripture reading. Even exercise and social connections. I also know from experience that at times we need the guidance of a wise one in the faith to help us learn to trust. Seek out those wise ones, if and when you need their guidance. For it is our trust in the Eternal One, and our trust in the faith of Jesus, that roots us in a peace “not as the world gives” in spite of all that may burden us.

In closing, I'd like to share the example of **Alfred Neufeld** of Paraguay, a giant in the faith whom the global Mennonite community lost four years ago. Born and raised in the same Chaco Mennonite colony as Damaris Schmucker's mom, Alfred was an exceptional theologian, historian, teacher, global Mennonite churchman and polyglot. Not to mention photographer and music-lover. Yet at heart he was a pastor and family man. He had a zest for life and people, exuding personal warmth and inner peace, in spite of numerous health limitations and challenges. He died far too young at age 65.

Alfred authored many books for the church. The title of his systematic theology captivates me: ***Vivir desde el futuro de Dios***. He wrote this book in Spanish. Translated it is *Living in the Light of God's Future. Living in the Light of God's Future*.

Ponder that: ***We live in the light of God's future***. That's the core of our faith, isn't it. By living and trusting in the Eternal One we ground ourselves in profound peace regardless of what worries us—even when we don't feel at peace. Yes, even when we don't feel at peace, we know that we are in God's hands, whatever the future may bring. And that our community of faith will wrap God's loving care around us, come what may.

**We are at peace and unafraid.**