

Last Sunday, like you, I watched First Parish's worship service. I enjoyed it tremendously. There was a wonderful message and familiar, comfortable surroundings. It was bittersweet. I remember a time when we were all together in the sanctuary. I remember what it felt like, what it sounded like...the energy... I recognize that we're not in that same place now. It will likely be some time before we are together in that same way again. Even though it may seem as though nothing is happening, know that people are at work right now...your church leadership is working on ways for us to be together again as safely as possible. And still, we wait. And waiting is hard.

It's hard to wait for the college acceptance letter or the employer's job offer. It's hard to wait for test results. It's hard to wait while a family member is in surgery. Waiting is hard and it's uncomfortable when things are not as they were. In this time of pandemic, there is a lot that not as it was. Graystone builders cancelled their bonfire for YCSA and the Harvest Fest that usually happens at the beach is not happening this year. And so we wait for a time when things can be as they were—or as they will be, transformed by this experience. And still we wait. And waiting can be even harder when you feel that the current circumstances are far from ideal.

I have great news for you, I've got the antidote. Grace and peace and it's not something that *I have* (as in that I am mediating). It's something you already have. God's grace and peace can take the edge off otherwise difficult and challenging time.

Psychology Today featured an article about resilience early in the pandemic. Five of the "Seven Skills of Resilience" can be compared our scripture passage today: Paul is talking to the church and in the article it says, "Stay connected with sources of support", be helpful to others (comfort to others), activate positive emotion (grace and peace to you), cultivate an attitude of survivorship (Paul says that Christ suffered too and we'll be comforted), seek meaning (Paul reminds us that we are connected to each other and to God and Jesus). (Mar 31, 2020 Psychology Today: Seven Skills of Resilience)

The American Psychological Association also has tips for promoting resiliency and not surprisingly, those are also connected to what the Apostle Paul said. They encourage you to find ways to be part of a group, to find purpose by helping others, and to keep things in perspective. What you're going through now isn't an indicator of your future. (<https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>)

Paul wrote his letters to church communities experiencing tension (and God knows that we are experiencing tension...in many areas of our lives and our world right now). Today's passage reminds each of us that there is consolation in Christ. Not only can our faith be a comfort to us, be we can each bless others with comfort.

It's like a reminder of gifts that we got and left in their box and stored in the attic. And when we open them up, we are blessed. Those gifts are grace and peace—and they are transformative.

“Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” is how the Apostle Paul began his letters to churches. He immediately acknowledges the tension and dissipates the tension by reminding the folks that they are connected by something larger than themselves. God. Christ. Spirit. Transcendence. Eternity. Love. By opening with God's grace and peace, Paul is blessing the people right where they are—in their discomfort. He's sharing those gifts for the place the people are in physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Just like salt makes a difference in cooking, grace and peace can soften interactions. Grace and peace are not only gifts for us, but for all those that we encounter. These are gifts that if we're willing, will keep on giving, keep on blessing everyone with whom we come in contact and those with whom they come in contact.

I know of the disaster cycle tells me we've entered the phase called 'disillusionment'...and unfortunately, given where we are in the pandemic and with flu season only a few months away, I'm afraid things won't be the way they were anytime soon.

But grace and peace can make a tremendous difference! They take the edge off the frustration and the pain. Paul isn't offering grace and peace because he needs to mediate it, but because it's already been given to the people. He's reminding them of the gifts of peace and divine love and mercy that they've received not because they did something special to deserve these gifts, but because God wanted to share those gifts.

God loves you. God knows your name. God knows your circumstances. God's promise to us are not that we'll never suffer. No, as Paul points out, even Jesus suffered. God's promise is that we will receive comfort.

As I was thinking about this service, I thought about all the other times in the history of the Bible where there were dramatic upsets and things were no longer the way they once were.

What we are experiencing is just a little bit like what it must have been for our forebears in faith when the Temple was razed and when the people were exiled. The familiar rituals were no more, and yet, the people maintained their relationship with God and God maintained a relationship with the people.

How must it have felt for the Israelites, wandering through the desert for 40 years and waiting for a time to finally be settled in the Promised Land? We know that there was 'murmuring' and that the people took matters into their own hands making their own idols...and yet, with God's grace and peace, they did get there. How was it for Noah in the ark, getting tossed around for 40 days and nights and trying to keep the lions from tearing the lambs apart, waiting to be on

solid ground again? And finally seeing that dove of peace with an olive branch...How was it for Jesus, out in the hot sun, being tempted for 40 days? Waiting for this time to be over so that he could go back to his cousin, his friends, and his home. He must have relied on his inner peace to get through it.

God is with you, too, in the waiting for things to change. Grace and peace can take the edge off of the frustration you're feeling that the world isn't the way you want it to be.

There's a facet of Paul's letters that many not be readily apparent. It's patience. With email, Zoom, and social media platforms, everything today seems instant. Paul may have written Second Corinthians in Philippi (about 400 miles) away from Corinth. In Biblical times, it would have taken days, weeks, or even months for Paul to get a letter to his churches. Patience is a virtue. When you get anxious about how things are unfolding in this pandemic time, I pray that you avail yourself of God's gift of peace. When you think about all the is 'wrong' with your life today, I pray that you remember of God's gift of grace and look to see all that is 'right'.

Second Corinthians, from the outset, shares gifts to build resilience in any time of difficulty. They take the focus from the frustrating circumstances and they have us shift our gaze into another direction. Instead of looking out in annoyance, anger, or disappointment, we look up with gratitude, humility, and awe. Once filled with divine grace and peace, we can channel that out and let it imbue all of our actions and interactions.

Have you ever had chickenpox? If so, you know that you get really itchy. So itchy that you can't concentrate on anything else. And you want to scratch, and even though you know that it will leave a scar, you find yourself scratching the itch and then it hurts all the more because you've got an open wound that does scar. Calamine lotion helps a little. When I was a kid, if we had a prolonged illness, my mom would get us a present of up to a \$10 value. While it may sound odd, it was actually brilliant on my parents' part. It made us shift our focus from the discomfort of the condition to the joy of knowing there was someone and something to bring us comfort. And when I was more comfortable, I could comfort my younger siblings.

Even in your discomfort now, Christ's peace can bring you comfort. When you remember that you, as a Christian, are part of something far larger than just yourself, you have a new perspective. When you realize that God may speak to you through another, you start listening. When you realize that you have the power to bring comfort to others, you start speaking graciously and peacefully. Every area of our lives will continue to be impacted by C-19 for some time. We can walk through this together. As Christians, when we receive the gifts of grace and peace, we can have hope in the face of adversity and we can encourage each other. May it be so. Blessed be and amen.