

Sandi Schwab: 12/9/19

Advent Weekly – Peace

One Square Inch of Silence

Our world is full of the ever-increasing noise of manmade sounds. How often do you hear that there “just doesn’t seem to be peace anywhere?” Anxiety and anger over anything and everything, people shouting at, or rather, towards each other, trying to be heard over everyone else trying to be heard. It’s exhausting and feels depressing. The You Version Bible app that so many of us use has no less than 50 reading plans under the topic of peace. 50! Peace of some kind is what many of us long for, it seems. It’s on a lot of minds as we try to cope.

Where do you go to feel at peace? At a lake, mountains, forest, a flowing river, or somewhere else? Where is the quietest place you’ve ever been? Close your eyes and visualize that place. See if you can recapture how you felt in that spot. What determines peace for you? Is it just the absence of noise or is it something else altogether?

One place of quiet and utter peace that I have experienced was in south central Colorado, far from cities or large towns, staring up at a glittering diamond night sky and watching a meteor shower. Very little sound except for the slight whoosh of wind and the beating of my own heart. That kind of peaceful moment sticks with you and makes you long to experience it again. Moments like that are when I feel the closest to God.

During the past year, I became familiar with the Enneagram. (I know, I’m late to the game!) I am fairly confident that I am an Enneagram 9. One of the characteristics of 9’s that I have read about and identify with is that “the world is often too loud for enneagram 9’s.” That’s me. I crave peace the way others crave chocolate or queso. And it’s hard to come by on a daily basis.

I’ve recently been listening to a podcast on the morning drive to work called “The Wild,” a nature podcast that I really enjoy. An episode from the first season is titled “The Quietest Place on Earth.” (It’s worth the time to listen to, and it’s fascinating. Highly recommend!) Two sound engineers, Gordon Hempton and Matt Mikkelsen, travel the world looking for “one square inch of silence.” They are on a mission to find the quietest places on earth. They record the sounds of nature and lack of “human noise” in these remote spaces with high tech equipment. The resultant recordings are pure and astoundingly beautiful. (Search for Gordon Hempton on Spotify to have a listen.) As they explain, they are not looking for the total absence of sound, but places that are at peace, with only the sounds of nature. The criteria are tough. The “quiet” places have to be a certain number of miles from roads, flight paths, or any sources of manmade noise. They are difficult to find and usually even more difficult to reach. They sometimes hike miles upon miles with their equipment just to see if a spot qualifies. Not only is this kind of peace elusive, it is also shrinking. Gordon Hempton says, “We need quiet places to remember who we are.” He’s right. But I would take that a step further. As Christians, we need quiet places and peace to hear God, for God to remind us who we are, and who He is. We need

and crave peace from the chaotic world. It is essential for our spiritual growth and connection with God.

One of my favorite moments of an encounter with God in scripture is when God tells Elijah to

go stand on a mountain, in the Lord's presence. As the Lord passes by, a great and mighty wind tears at the mountains and shatters the cliffs, followed by an earthquake, followed by a fire. What calamity! How must Elijah have felt standing through all of that? But God was not present in any of those. God was in the soft whisper that followed all the chaos. It was only then that he spoke to Elijah. 1 Kings 19:9-13

This second week of Advent focuses on the peace that Christ's birth brings. I confess that I feel much less than peaceful this time of year. Instead, I feel frantic, rushed, and tired. I have yet to find the formula for meeting even the minimum of expectations of family and friends, and also make time for moments of serenity, being at peace with myself and those around me, much less at peace with God. To really focus on Christ, and what his gift of peace means for my life is hard to do. Perhaps I find a moment of peace, then it slips away and I'm back to the reality of daily life.

But Jesus has promised us peace. He has promised if we ask him, he will give it.

"I have said these things so that in me you might have peace." John 16:33

He desires that we let his "peace rule in our hearts." Col. 3:15.

Let it be so!

If he promised it, it is attainable through him. Let's ask for peace, for Christ to show us the way of peace through him daily.

My prayer for all of us this during this season is that you will carve out moments of peace.

May we each search out place and space for peace, peace with Christ, peace with one another, peace with neighbors and strangers alike. May you share those moments with both your physical family and with God's family.

And may that peace continue to grow in your heart to be much larger than one square inch.\