

SERMON

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity

Gustaf Wingren

Romans 12:18 · 1943

1 August 1943

Motala Town Park

Text: Romans 12:18

Hymns: 421:1–3; 35:4–6

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live at peace with all.”

These words stand in today’s Epistle. “Peace” is a common word in the New Testament. For the New Testament was written in a time without peace, when people hungered for peace without getting it. The first Christian congregation knew where peace was to be found — a peace that held even in martyrdom — and it handed people this peace through the gospel of the forgiveness of sins. For faith in Christ as the one who reconciles means this: “I have done much evil, but this evil cannot harm me. It cannot come back on me. It is struck out.” A person who is truly certain of this in his innermost heart can think of God with inner calm. He has peace with God. And to him this commandment is also spoken: now you are to keep peace with the people you live with, take pains to be in harmony with everyone, and avoid strife as far as possible. “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live at peace with all.”

We live once again in a time without peace. There was quite another calm over the world of our grandfathers and great-grandfathers. People went on foot or drove behind a horse — no trains, no cars, no flying machines. They talked face to face or wrote letters — no telephones, no radio. Now it is impossible to flee in earnest from all the noises, all the crashes, all the loudspeakers. They chase us out to the very farthest edge of the loneliest countryside. People have changed too. Even in our childhood it was rather unusual for people to travel and go here and there. Someone who had been to Stockholm could almost be proud of it. People used to live in a small, limited, familiar world. Now everyone has the whole world thrown at him.

And we want it that way. We are almost a little afraid of silence, stillness, seclusion — “isolation,” as people say.

And God — how many reckon with him? There is a desolate air around modern man, man without prayer, without faith. For the one who reckons with God there is a deep peace in devotion, in thinking about him. But modern, heathen man knows no rest but the animal's. He is a piece of nature, flesh and blood in good trim. He does not ask about peace with God.

On the other hand, he is interested in good and peaceful relations between himself and other people. He is interested in peace, both out there in the world and here at home, in society. He dislikes war, and he hates quarrels.

But the course of the world will not fit our wishes. Let us point to just two things: first, the wars, and second, the divorces. Out there in the great world, and in here in the small world of the home, the lack of peace has rather increased. And that, after all, is what makes our times so hopelessly without peace.

Even for the peoples that have been allowed to stand outside it, this new world war has worn the masses down heavily. For many it is impossible to enjoy the summer evening properly, however beautiful it is, for out there beyond the horizon the peoples lie in bloody struggle. One does not dare hope that we ourselves will escape. One does not dare let the heart's full joy loose, but shuts away a piece of the joy and saves it — until “there is peace.” In many people the war has an inhibiting, locking effect even in their purely personal lives. There is a lack of peace lurking in the soul.

But the other thing is still worse: the decay of the home. For we need a calm place to withdraw to after the strife of the day. If people are at one at home, they can bear even misfortune. A certain firmness comes into the heart, and one has strength to take life's blows. But if there is no peace at home, nothing is really enjoyable. If the home lies waiting at the end of the workday as a sullen, hostile power, it is harder to draw strength. One has, as it were, nowhere to flee. And it does seem that homes in our time are not what they used to be. People hardly reckon with them. They are no longer the power station for the individual. He is flung out of the home, and so he comes to lack a calm point in existence. All this adds to the lack of peace and wears down people's strength.

How has it come to this? The self stands at the center. Modern man worships freedom and hates every bond on his own self. But if I ruthlessly put myself at the center, it must fall on my

neighbor. If my neighbor puts his self at the center, it must fall on me. Living together is the same thing as discipline of the self, self-control, the ability at times to do without. Peace between people and between peoples presupposes self-denial.

And self-denial does not exist without fellowship with God. Natural, heathen man has many strong sides, beautiful sides. But self-denial he does not have, and so the lack of peace follows in his tracks. For self-denial is found only in the one who can look into himself and say to himself: you are evil. Only the one who has stood before God's face, stood at Christ's cross, can do that. He sees the wickedness in man: that man wills himself.

Before: first, peace was the normal thing; second, war and quarrels were something to be astonished at.

Now: first, war and strife are the normal thing, what comes by itself; second, peace is what one must work hard for on earth.

So to win peace, one must fight against the evil that is found in oneself. One may see that here in ourselves there is enough hatred of other peoples to start a war, if it came to that — there is no need to be astonished that other peoples hate. One understands that a home is bound to become full of strife if life is left to roll on by itself — if one does not deliberately make an effort to handle hard differences of opinion, if one does not put one's back into it day by day to be a good and patient person. So one is driven toward God again. One must ask about God's will and examine oneself in prayer and reflection. That can happen alone. Whoever can arrange to have family devotions in his home will surely notice what a healing drink it is to be made to come before God with all the little disagreements in the home. God's will may lay itself over the contending wills and soften them, so that each side gives way a little. Peace in the home fares worse if one spouse is to bow to the other than if both bow to God. Humble people do not quarrel with one another.

Peace with God, peace from God, is a gift that lies there unused. Receive it. Pray now and then, and be still now and then before God. Receive his holy power.

Peace with your fellow human beings, at home and at work, is a task you must work at. It does not come by itself. Fight against yourself. Fight, now and then, against your own self. Then there can be peace on earth — on the bit of the earth that is yours. Amen.

Translator's notes. The sermon was preached in the open air, in Motala's town park. The two short "Formerly / Now" lists are in outline form in the typescript ("1/ ... 2/ ..."); they are set out here as two short paragraphs with "first" and "second," adding nothing. "Ofrid," which he sets against "frid," is rendered "lack of peace" or "without peace," to keep the one word "peace" at the center as he does. "Kraftstation" is "power station." Only the text verse is quoted; no prayer is written out in the typescript.

Gustaf Wingren · draft translation ·