

Sermon for Sunday, August 17, 1975, by Dr. Andrew A. Jumper, Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"LYING IN THE BED YOU MAKE"

St. John 14:12-27

Text: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

--St. John 14:27

When I was a young person, it was not exactly unheard of for me to get myself in trouble of one sort or another from time to time. Often, I would go to my mother with the consequence of my sins, hoping, I suppose, that somehow she would get me out of my problem. But mother was a stern sort of person when it came to responsibility. She would say to me, "Son, I love you, but you have made your bed and you will have to lie in it." She meant that I had to bear the consequence of past decisions; she meant that I had to face the responsibility for things I had done. Quite frankly, that helped me. Somehow I would square my shoulders and face up to my punishment or the consequences that were due me. I had, indeed, made my bed and with resolve and determination I would lie in it.

I suppose that was good training. Over the years it has helped me to face up to life and helped me to be a reasonably responsible person. One of the things that often bothers me today about us parents is our permissiveness with our children. They do things they shouldn't, they get into trouble, they make poor grades, or whatever. And we parents try to help them escape the consequence of what they have done. I feel sure that we are not really helping them. Sometimes it is important for us to have to lie in the bed we have made for awhile. We may discover that bed is so uncomfortable that we will make sure we never lie in it again. Not too long ago a family came to me with a problem. Their teen-age son had been involved in some serious trouble. He had been responsible for an automobile accident and when the police arrived they found marijuana in his car. The family wanted me to help them get their son out of trouble. I talked to the boy and found no sense of regret, no remorse, no repentance. He only wanted me to convince his parents that they shouldn't take his car away for a month. I refused to help, but the parents paid for the accident, got the boy off in court, and gave him his car back. Three weeks later he was in a more serious accident that almost took the lives of several people. Had he been made to lie in the bed he first made, perhaps the second incident would not have happened.

But this implies that lying in the bed you make is related only to bad things. It has a negative connotation about it. Let me suggest that lying in the bed you make can have a positive element to it. Lying in the bed you have made can be the most rewarding and peaceful thing you ever did. Lying in the bed you make can give you peace--the kind of peace that Jesus talked about in our scripture for this morning.

Now there are many kinds of peace. For example, there is peace in the sense that we do not have a war going on. Another kind of peace is freedom from civil disturbance. A third kind of peace is public order when we speak of someone who violates the law as "breaking the peace." A fourth sort of peace we long for today might be described as mental or emotional peace. It is a peace we want that is characterized by freedom from fears, freedom from passions, freedom from moral conflict. It is freedom from the troubles and problems of life, freedom from the conflict between two abrasive personalities. We are a people who take tranquilizers by the tons and who have an emotionally disturbed person in every other hospital bed. Our insecurities and inner

turmoils are underscored by the fact that a book about peace of mind is a sure-fire best seller. So, when we speak of peace, we may mean any number of things. And since peace is something that all of us are seeking in our lives, it is certainly not beside the point to ask the question, "Is there any place where peace can be found?" For that reason, the words of Jesus are extremely relevant for us today when he says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

This morning I want to do two things. First, I want to talk about the kind of peace Jesus is talking about. Second, I want to share with you how you can have that peace.

First of all let's look at the sort of peace Jesus gives. Notice in the first place that it isn't the peace of the world. "Not as the world gives do I give to you." It won't be freedom from war, freedom from civil strife, freedom from crime, or even freedom from the fears and anxieties of life. I think of Stephen, the first Christian to give his life for his faith. He didn't have freedom from trouble and conflict. He found himself in violent opposition to the Jews and they in turn began to stone him to death. Yet he had a peace of incredible dimensions. Even as he was dying, the Bible tells us he looked into the face of Jesus in heaven and cried out, "lay not this sin to their charge." So, first, the peace of Jesus doesn't mean freedom from problems. As a matter of fact, our text today is part of the funeral service. Yet, Jesus says it is a peace that the world doesn't give.

Notice secondly that the peace of Jesus is in the heart. In our text, Jesus says, "Let not your hearts be troubled..." At one point in his life, King David was in great danger and was forced to flee for his life. During that period he wrote a beautiful psalm, and this is what it says: "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety." As one commentator, writing on this psalm, puts it, "here is a heart which knows itself secure in the peace of God." So, first, the peace of Jesus has nothing to do with external circumstances and second, it is an inner peace of the heart. Notice in the third place that this peace is a gift freely given from God. See that Jesus very clearly said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you..." So you can't buy God's peace, you can't win it, earn it, deserve it. It is a gift from Jesus. I think that is what St. Paul meant when he wrote, "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1) and when he said, "For Jesus is our peace." (Ephesians 2:14)

So the peace of Jesus has nothing to do with external circumstances of life, it is an inner peace of the heart, and it is a gift. The second thing I want to deal with is this: how does one get this peace? The answer is quite simple. You get this peace by surrendering yourself completely to Jesus. You get it by turning your life over completely to him. You make a decision about Jesus--you make your bed, so to speak, and then you lie in it. And when you do that, you have the peace that Jesus is talking about.

See how it works. Back in the 1890's a tightrope walker from France came to this country and won a great deal of fame by his spectacular feats. He then announced that he would walk a tightrope across Niagara Falls carrying a man on his shoulders. A young man volunteered and Blondin, the tightrope walker, practiced with him beforehand. "Remember," he said, "my will is supreme. You must not resist me in any way."

I must be completely in command." When the young man had learned to trust himself completely to Blondin, the walk was made. Years later the young man became an outstanding Christian leader. He said that the greatest lesson in his life was what he learned from Blondin. When he learned to surrender himself to God as completely as he had to the tightrope walker, he was at peace even when he was over the deadly Niagara Falls of life.

Dr. John Mackay, former president of Princeton Seminary, has a little book entitled, A Preface to Christian Theology. In it he has a beautiful illustration of the sort of peace that comes to the surrendered life. First, he quotes from the Psalmist who writes, "Oh, that thou hadst harkened to my commandments, then had thy peace been as a river." The young people have a song that takes that phrase for one of its verses and they sing, "I've got peace like a river in my soul." Then Dr. Mackay writes, "A river is the most perfect parable that nature offers of the meaning of Christian peace. A river, not a stagnant pool; the river Jordan, not the Dead Sea. For what is a river?" Then he answers his own question, "It is a flowing way. Waters that come tumbling down a thousand hillsides, purposeless and unchanneled, and oftentimes agents of destruction in an unhappy countryside find their way at last into a single river bed. From the moment of confluence, where they commit themselves to a common channel, their bed is made. They are at peace. The channel will lead them by many a strange way to the sea, which is their goal." And then Dr. Mackay talks about life and how it is like a river. He says, "In the upland plateaus the waters flow perchance through sunlit meadows, 'quiet waters,' like those in the Shepherd's Psalm. Anon they disappear in a dark mountain gorge, plunging headlong in swirling eddies through 'caverns measureless to man.' Farther on they rush to the brink of a cataract and, in foam and thunder, shoot across its brow. Then, (like the waters having shot over the falls) the waters of the Niagara River continue their lordly way till they reach (their destination,) the sea."

Isn't that a fascinating analogy? Once those waters make their bed, they are at peace. They are no longer purposeless and unchanneled. Their bed is made and they are at peace. When we surrender ourselves completely--totally--to Jesus, when we make up our minds about Him and commit our lives utterly to Him, our bed is made. We are at peace. Our way may sometimes lie through bright and sunlit meadows. Sometimes, our way may plunge through sunless caverns; sometimes our way may flow through foaming, roaring cataracts of life. But we are at peace. We are lying in the bed we have made and as the river flows to the sea, so we know that our lives are flowing towards God.

Back in the Old Testament, God called Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to Him. Abraham was an old man and Isaac was the only child he would ever have. But Abraham had made his bed. He had trusted God and committed his life to him. It was the final test of surrender for this Godly man. So it was that in peace Abraham went to Mt. Moriah to obey God because his bed was made. He discovered that God did not want Isaac's life, but he wanted the total trust of Abraham. Yes, Abraham found peace because he had made his bed with God. Dr. Alexander MacLaren, commenting on this, says, "Every man has his Isaac." He means that for each of us there is the point in Christian experience where we must let go of trust in the world, let go of trust in others, let go of trust in self, and surrender ourselves completely to the love and power of God. It means to make our bed with God and lie in it, knowing that though it goes through meadows, or dark caverns, or foaming

cataracts, it will eventually lead us to Him. And when we know that, we have peace. Not the peace of the world, not peace that is freedom from trouble or hurt or sacrifice. But peace in the heart, peace that is a gift that comes when we make our bed with God and lie in it.

Do you have peace this morning? You can, you know. It means to surrender yourself to Jesus. To commit your life totally--completely--to Him and then to lie in the bed you have made. You see, eventually it will carry you to God.

A preface to Christian pacifism. In it he has a beautiful illustration of the sort of peace that comes to the surrendered life. First, he quotes from the Parable of the Sower, "The seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. The seed fell on the rocky soil, and when it came up, it withered because it had no moisture. The seed fell on the thorny soil, and the thorns came up and choked it. The seed fell on the good soil, and it came up and bore fruit." Then Dr. Mackay writes, "A river is the most perfect parable that nature offers of the meaning of Christian peace. A river, not a stagnant pool, the river Jordan, not the Dead Sea. For what is a river? Then he answers his own question, 'It is a flowing way.' Waters that come tumbling down a thousand hillsides, gorges, and unchanneled, and oftentimes agents of destruction in an unchanneled way as fast as they flow. From the moment of confluence, where they come into a single river bed. They are at peace. They are at peace. The channel will lead them by many a strange way to the sea, which is their goal." and then Dr. Mackay takes about life and how it is like a river. He says, "In the uplifted plateau the waters flow through swift meadows, quiet waters, like those in the Shepherd's field. When they disappear in a dark mountain gorge, plunging headlong in swirling eddies through cavernous mazes to sea. Then, as they rush to the brink of a cataract and, in foam and thunder, shoot across its brow. Then, (like the waters having shot over the falls) the waters of the Niagara River continue their lonely way till they reach (their destination) the sea."

Isn't that a fascinating analogy? Once those waters reach their bed, they are at peace. They are no longer purposeless and unchanneled. Their bed is made and they are at peace. When we surrender ourselves completely--totally--to Jesus, when we make up our minds about Him and commit our lives utterly to Him, our bed is made. We are at peace. Our way may sometimes be through swift meadows, sometimes, our way may plunge through sunless caverns; sometimes our way may flow through foaming, roaring cataracts of life, but we are at peace. We are lying in the bed we have made and as the river flows to the sea, so we know that our lives are flowing towards God.

Back in the Old Testament, God called Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to Him. Abraham was an old man and Isaac was the only child he would ever have. But Abraham had made his bed. He had trusted God and committed his life to Him. It was the final test of surrender for this Godly man. So it was that in peace Abraham went to the altar to obey God because his bed was made. He discovered that God did not want Isaac's life, but he wanted the royal trust of Abraham. Yes, Abraham found peace because he had made his bed with God. Dr. Alexander MacLaren, commenting on this, says, "Every man and his Isaac." He means that for each of us there is the point in Christian experience where we must let go of trust in the world, let go of trust in others, let go of trust in self, and surrender ourselves completely to the love and power of God. It means to make our bed with God and lie in it, knowing that though it goes through meadows, or dark caverns, or foaming