Memory Verse: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27

Slide 1: Title Slide

I am Cassi Betker, the Director of Youth Ministries here at Forest Hills. This summer, we are digging deeper into the Fruit of the Spirit. So far, Pastor Andrew has spoken on Love and Joy. I get the privilege today to continue on with Cultivating Peace. Normally, I am talking to teenagers and not adults, so let’s see how this goes.

Slide 2: Family Picture

Now, we are going to get to know me a bit better. Here is a lovely picture of my family there is me Steve and Lily. On the surface it is picture perfect. We are smiling, the sky is full of colors and the beauty of Lake Superior is in the background. What this picture doesn’t show is the tears and screaming and that was just me. As the saying goes “If Mama’s not happy no ones happy” and that was true that day, no one was happy after my meltdown. I am not sure why I decided to have family pictures at sunrise, when I am not a morning person. Then when we got out to Lake Superior that morning it was cold, foggy and wet, I know it’s Lake Superior I should have expected it. The camera didn’t want to work in those conditions and I didn’t handle it well. That morning was anything other than peaceful, despite what the picture shows. Peace seems to be elusive in not only that morning but also in our lives. It is probably because it is something we don’t often think of or if we do we think of it, it’s as a global problem. After my many years of pageantry, I normally only think of peace like these pageant contestants from the movie Miss Congeniality.

Slide 3: Video Clip 40 secs

Slide 3: What is Peace?

Don’t we all have a tendency to define peace like that video clip as a great idea but in the abstract. We view it as an absence of conflict, in terms of war or arguments. Webster defines peace as a state or period in which there is no war or a war has ended. We all desire peace. People are always searching for peace all on their own. We sing songs about it and travel on pilgrimages to find it. Many wealthy, famous, and powerful people would trade everything for just one moment of peace. What they often find, however, is the world’s false peace. This false peace is self serving and fleeting. It is different from the peace offered by Jesus.

Slide : Isaiah 26:3

God defines peace in a completely different way than society. The biblical concept of peace is a more personal definition and rests heavily on its Hebrew word Shalom, which means "to be complete" or "to be sound." The verb conveys both a dynamic and a static meaning" to be complete or whole" or "to live well.” The Hebrew concept of peace refers to the state of well-being, wholeness, and harmony in all relationships.

Isaiah 26:3 states “You will keep in perfect peace, those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.”

Shalom is multidimensional, the complete well-being — physical, psychological, socially, and spiritually; it flows from all of one’s relationships being put right — with God, with oneself, and with others. But, keeping Shalom is hard. When someone sits down in our living room that family picture is the first thing they see. It showcases all we want the world to see, a smiling loving family, not one that struggles to see eye to eye at times. This picture represents a broader problem with our society though. It shows how we are different people in different situations. How we don’t necessarily want people to see all aspects of our lives. How many of us act the same way at work as we do at home or at home the same way we do when we are out with friends or at work the same way we do at church.

Slide 4: Personal NOT Public

We have a tendency to treat our faith the same way. We compartmentalize it as a home or church life. At home we may have a strong faith life but once we get to work we tend to act differently. Publicly, we talk about our faith as personal, “just between God and me”, or we don’t talk about it outside of our home or church, maybe you don’t talk about your faith at all. This makes perfectly good sense in a society where we have been trained since birth to think of ourselves primarily as private individuals. We have determined that our faith is about us. From beginning to end, Scripture assumes that while personal faith is required for salvation, the personal faith that God demands of us is not a private faith. But trying to embody such integrity (that is, a fully integrated life) is difficult in a society that cultivates fragmentation rather than the wholeness of shalom. Most of us realize that being a follower of Christ has implications for all aspects of our lives, not just a few “private” or “religious” ones. This is such an important distinction for every Christ-follower to understand. Is your Christian faith personal? Of course! It's deeply personal! Your relationship with Jesus is your relationship with him, and it belongs to no one else but you. You filter your life, your thoughts, your emotions, and your experiences through the "eyes" of faith that the Holy Spirit has given you.

Is your Christian faith private? Only if you are living in fear rather than faith. Because the most natural act of the person who believes in Jesus is "at once" to profess to others that Jesus is the Son of God. That profession becomes one of the hardest things for Christians to do. I am not talking about the simplicity of saying I am a Christain or wearing a cross around your neck. But, those hard day to day choices that show our faith to those around us. We often work, commute, live, eat, worship with quite different sets of people. As a result, it’s easy to be a different person in each of these spheres.

Slide 5: If the public you isn’t the real you; who is?

We are most often more Christian in our behaviors in our home then in public. We justify that difference, we make statements such as our home is our haven, you are free to be you, you can’t tell me how to believe. But, if the “public you” at work or school for forty odd hours a week isn’t the real you then who is? And just as importantly, what is the connection between the different yous?

This country promotes individuality above all else. A view of individuality as our primary goal, doesn’t work when we have been incorporated into the body of Christ. We are incapable of securing peace ourselves. In our fallen state we are not capable of living righteously before God and our fellow humans. Why? Because when faith is reduced to the private domains of life it ceases to have public and interpersonal effect. The test of Christian faith is not what people individually choose or want. The only real test is the test of love. Jesus put it plainly when he told his followers to love others as he loved them. Love is the crucial thing because love is the power that nurtures relationships, reconciles divisions, and heals the world. As such our deeply personal faith must have political, social, and economic effect.

Jesus does not call people to the cozy confines of the home or church. He calls them to go out into the world to share love rather than hate, and to practice humility and mercy rather than arrogance and indifference. Faith is a personal and a public thing.

Slide 6: John 14:27

When we begin to walk and talk in that wholeness from one setting to another, one relationship to another, we begin to receive the peace Jesus is talking about. John 14:27 states “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.”

The peace offered by the world is an empty promise and can only bring temporary comfort. God’s peace is a permanent peace offered by the only One who can be trusted to keep his Word and heal our sin. God has reconciled the world in Christ, thereby re-establishing genuine shalom between God and creation. God alone is the source of peace, for he is "Yahweh Shalom". The Lord came to sinful humankind desiring to enter into a relationship with them. He established with them a covenant of peace, which was sealed with his presence. Participants were given perfect peace so long as they maintained a right relationship with the Lord.

Now I could stop my message right here, that would be easier. This next part is hard. Maintaining a right relationship with the Lord. A right relationship with God, what does that even mean and how do we achieve it. A question to ask ourselves is do I have a right relationship with God? If we live in fragmentation how can we be right with the Lord. Are you living the life of a Christian in faithful obedience to God? Are you abiding in Jesus Christ?

Slides : John 15:4-6

Jesus taught in John 15:4-6, “Abide in Me, and I will abide in you. A branch cannot bear fruit if it is disconnected from the vine, and neither will you if you are not connected to Me. I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you abide in Me and I in you, you will bear great fruit. Without Me, you will accomplish nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is like a branch that is tossed out and shrivels up and is later gathered to be tossed into the fire to burn.” A personal relationship with God begins with knowing His Son Jesus Christ. As we grow in our faith, and become disciples, we begin to change from the inside out. You and I are destined for change. When we change our earthly relationships change also.

Slide : Personal AND Public

Jesus commands us to make disciples. Many people translate the phrase “make disciples” to mean teach Jesus’ people. No question, there is a teaching aspect to making disciples but it is much more than just teaching. Making disciples in the Bible carries with it the idea of introducing someone to Jesus for the first time. Influencing them to accept Jesus as their Savior and then inviting them to see what a life devoted to Jesus looks like by watching you. Therefore, every follower of Jesus who is actually making disciples is first sharing their faith in Jesus in a very public way.

So, let me go back to the first question for just a minute- can faith be personal and private? Yes. But,can it be personal and private at the same time that you are making disciples? No! You can and should have a personal faith. Just remember, if your faith is private, you are not really making disciples. We must view our faith as personal and public. Once we have this very counter cultural view of faith as being personal and public, it becomes easier to be the same person at home, work and church. We start to live a fully integrated life. What was once fragmented becomes whole. We receive the peace God is offering.

Slide : Go be a peacemaker!

The peace of God must be evident in us. Others need to see what we have and desire to have it. Then we must be peacemakers, able to share the love of God with a troubled world.

There is nothing more blessed than sewing peace into the lives of those around you. They need Jesus, the only source of peace, and you have what they need. Go be a peacemaker!

Benediction:

Jesus said “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33 Go be Peacemakers.