

July 24, 2022

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Pastor Matt Duerr

“IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL”

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, amen. Well, if you're here and you're hearing the sermon from me today, it means I'm back from vacation. If I'm not there it means something happened on vacation and you're still watching the video, I did beforehand. But in a little bit of a prophecy shall we say, I'd like to speak about that vacation. Um, I needed it! It's been a very busy, and yet stressful, and fulfilling six months in 2022 so far.

I'm very pleased with where we are with the Unity progress. I think we are doing what is right and it's what Jesus prayed for in the high priestly prayer that we might be one as He and the Father are one. Yes, the digital world is still not my favorite, in fact, it's a royal headache with a very steep learning curve. But we've made progress and I think you're going to see more progress in the weeks and months to come.

Bible study has been excellent. We've done the Walk Through the Bible, we've got the Sunday morning Book of Isaiah, we've started Revelation at Jackson and we had a Creation/Evolution Seminar. And I'm pleased with that as we grow in our knowledge of the Lord and of His Word.

On vacation, I imagine I had a good time. We went to Disneyland, at least that's the plan, with my grandkids and I can imagine it was a blast. From there went to the mountains and those of you who know me, know that for me is the happiest place on earth, not Disneyland. I love the mountains. It's a place where when I'm there for just a little while, I'm put into the mode of our sermon hymn today; It is well with my soul.

And that concept of it being well with my soul, or our soul, is a truly biblical experience. Consider our gospel this morning Peter, James, and John experienced wellness of their soul as they went up the mount of transfiguration with Jesus and saw Him transfigured into all His glory;

and saw Moses, the great deliverer with Him, and Elijah the great prophet. It was so great that Peter said, 'Lord it is good for us to be here. If you wish, let us make here three tabernacles. One for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah.' How good was it? Please remember they didn't have recording devices. They didn't have cameras; they couldn't print out stuff. How in the world did they know Moses and Elijah then?

What they experienced is what Saint Paul would later write about in first Corinthians 13, verse 12, that great love chapter, where he says, "now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I am also known." And how well are we known, according to Jesus? God the Father knows the very number of hairs on our head. In other words, when we get to heaven, we'll understand everything as well as God understands it. And that's where Peter, James, and John were, they literally were experiencing heaven. And I think they felt, oh Lord it is well with our soul.

Or consider the growth of the early church as chronicled in the book of Acts. In Acts chapter seven, we see it didn't go all that well at the very beginning, at least for those who were the preachers. Stephen was stoned for his witnessing to Christ. And we read that Saul, who later became Saint Paul, he was consenting to Stephen's death. That's where chapter seven ends. Chapter eight begins with, "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church entering every house and dragging out men and women, committing them to prison." What was the result of that? Again, I quote, "therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word." This is how God fulfilled that prophecy that Jesus gave in Acts one, verse eight, when he told His disciples; "and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria and to the very ends of the earth."

And here's Phillip coming out of what is called the great dispersion and going north to Samaria. In the Old Testament it was called the northern Kingdom. But those people that had inhabited it at the time of Jesus were half-breeds. Half Jewish or Hebrew and half Gentile. And so, the Jews look down on them, they were outcasts. And the Samaritans in return looked down on the Jews and this is where Phillip goes into a hostile territory, to Hebrews, and what do we read? "With one accord they heeded the things spoken by Phillip." Why? Because they, quote "were

hearing and seeing the miracles which he did and there was great joy in that city.” It was well with their souls! The message that Phillip brought them was, ‘you’re not outcasts!’ God loves you, He sent His son to die for you. He wants you to be His redeemed children. We’re equal in God's eyes. Let's worship Him, let's honor Him, let's thank Him together. And I dare say, not only was it well with their soul, but I have also got to say I bet it was pretty well with Phillips’ soul. I would not mind it if the Lord blessed me with the ability to do some miracles and things like that, and have a whole city heed the words of the gospel.

And so, when we come then to our sermon hymn, It is Well With My Soul, who is the my? His name was Horatio G Stafford. What was his story? What caused him to write when peace like a river attendeth my way? When you hear that, it might be that you think of something like How Great Thou Art, he probably had some mountain top experience and was just, oh Lord this is great, this is awesome, I am at total peace, awesome wonder, I've seen the majesty of God. But wait, the very next line reads, when sorrows like sea billows roll. Sea billows, really? That's not peaceful, that's a storm! That's a hurricane. And notice, it's when sorrows, that's plural, and whatever crashing on his soul is when he says, ‘it is well, it is well with my soul.’ Well, what was he writing? Was he just saying, ‘hey times are going to be rough as a Christian, but hang in there, be strong! Or had he experienced something?

You probably figured it out, he experienced something, or some things because it's sorrows. Horatio was an attorney, a real estate attorney, tycoon, mogul, whatever you want to say in Chicago in the late 1800s. The year was 1871, and those of you who are history buffs are probably saying, ‘hey isn't that when there was the great Chicago Fire that burned the city to the ground?’ Yeah, and this real estate attorney, tycoon, mogul, lost everything. All of his ownings burned. A little bit later, he lost his only son, age 4, to scarlet fever. He didn't write It is Well with My Soul.

No instead, he drowned his grief in his work, and with a new renewed purpose in life. To work on behalf of the over 100,000 people who were displaced by that fire and get them homes to live in again. And

he worked diligently for over two years, and he was seeing the fruits of his labor and he was tired. And it was time for a vacation, a European vacation. Not like the one that Chevy Chase went on. No, he was going to go to Europe to visit his good lifelong friend Dwight L. Moody. The American evangelist, the one who is the founder of the Moody Bible institute and Moody publishers. Dwight Lyman Moody, who said “faith makes all things possible. Love makes all things easy.” He was taking this whole family to go and visit him while he was on an evangelistic crusade in Europe.

He took his wife Anna, his daughters Annie, age 12 Maggie, age 7, Bessie, age 4 and Donetta, age 18 months. As they were boarding the ship in New York, a messenger came running up to him with a telegram, there was a problem back in Chicago. Surprise, surprise, bureaucracy was already alive and well at that time. There were I quote, zoning issues.” So, he got his family on board told them go ahead and go. I will follow behind on the next ship. Let me get this stuff taken care of so these people can get their homes. And off they went. On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, that ship was struck by an ironclad ship, which ripped that ship in half. It sank quickly and all four daughters died. His wife was found barely conscious, clinging to a piece of wreckage, in the icy Atlantic. She and the 40 some survivors were taken to Wales where she sent a telegram to her husband. It had only two words; saved alone.

He immediately booked passage to get to Wales. He told the captain why he was going, that he was the husband of one of the 40 some survivors, and the father of four of the 226 victims. When they came to the place where that ship sank, the captain went and got him. It was a different scene when he passed over that area of the ocean. It was a tranquil ocean when he had his diary with him and he wrote, I quote: It is well, the will of God be done.” He took that back to his cabin and from that he wrote the four verses of the hymn that we just sang. It was quite different than the heady times of Peter, James, John, and Phillip.

But that's where we're going. We are embarking on a journey. A journey of praise where did the hymns we sing come from unlike many of the Christian songs today that are written for money, or because that is

the profession that someone has followed. The hymns were written out of life experiences some were very good some, like poor Mr. Stafford, are very bad. Whatever it is, the hymn writers took their emotions that were right here in their heart and put them to word and to music, fulfilling what we are told to do. "Whatever you do, in Word or deed, do all to the glory of God."

That is something that is strangely and uniquely Christian. You don't find other religions people writing praise and glory songs when they're in the midst of a terrible time like losing your family and yet the hymn writers do, because they know with God it's all OK. It is well with our soul. And that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ that is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord. That is why Mr. Stafford could say, could write; it is well, it is well, the will of God be done. Because what mattered most was that he knew his four children were with their Savior. He knew that young son of his was with his Savior. And he knew that God had allowed this to happen. But through the power of the Holy Spirit turned it into a time of praise and glory and contentment in the grace of God.

And may that be the outcome of this sermon series. That we, like those hymn writers before us rejoice, bring glory to God no matter what we do. It's taking our very lives and making them a life song in Jesus' Name, amen.