

Tending the Garden of God – Peace and Its Enemies

1. [baptism and garden] I will never forget the night that a young German girl quieted a continent. (story of the Eurovision song context and “A Little Peace.”) We’d had demonstrations against cruise missiles, politicians were being harangued in public...and this song didn’t fix anything and, yet it helped us and eased our minds.
2. In Galatians 5, peace is placed next to forbearance. I’d like to look at them as partners for, without one, you cannot have the other.
3. We don’t use the word “forbearance” very often so most people substitute patience or tolerance in its place. Those are excellent words and I think they give the general idea of “forbearance” but not the whole picture.
4. Let’s start with a verse that doesn’t contain any of these words: (1st Timothy 6:6-7) Anytime we are called to “godliness” we should and must pause for a moment and find our footing. What does it mean to be like God? Completely without sin? Can’t do that. Holy? We are all working on that. All powerful and wise? Nope. Then what is left?
5. God is love. 1st John 4:7-8. As we read the scripture, and especially the Gospels, we see God accepting, loving, forgiving, being patient, generous.... All of these things need to be in our garden if we are tending the garden of God. There is a practical guide to this in Romans chapters 14 and 15.
6. This is an extended sermon by Paul that starts in 14:1 and ends in 15:7. Think of the peace this offers us. We do not have to concern ourselves with fixing anyone else. We don’t have to correct them. We don’t have to call them out over something they believe or practice. If something is plainly written in God’s law, say, “Do not murder”, then we can say that murder is wrong. But most things are not quite that black and white.
7. Paul is quite blunt in Romans 14 and 15. (Romans 14:4, 10,12,13,17,19,22)

8. And it is in chapter 15 that we see peace linked with forbearance. (Romans 15:1-2) And it is in this chapter that we see what Paul means when he says “godliness.” (Romans 15:5,6)
9. So...to review...we will have peace when we remember that we are not God...but we are to act as God has acted toward us. We are not the source of light, merely reflections. And, yet, the moon is well loved and generally welcomed. So, we may be pale reflections of God but...reflections, nonetheless.
10. And how do we do that? By living lives of peace. And what is the enemy of peace? Fear, anger, competition, selfishness. Do an internal audit from time to time and ask “what is endangering my peace?”
11. As most of you know, I’ve taken on the task of beautifying the outdoor areas of an assisted living center in which my mother lives. It is a good way to spend my day off for it makes others happy and it also reminds me of the need to tend my garden. I have time on the drive to ask myself what helps me to be a man of peace and what helps me MAKE peace when needed...and what is in my way, what weeds are out there?
12. My weeds won’t be your weeds. That’s the whole point of being different people. That is where forbearance comes in. When we are babies, we cry angrily and throw a fit because what we want is not what the world is supplying at that very second. As Paul reminds us in the love chapter of 1st Corinthians 13, when we grow up, we are to put away childish things. (nothing wrong with child-like; this is about childishness).
13. Learning how to take all of this in and work the soil of our hearts so that we are people of peace who bear with others because we love them...and we love them because we want to be like our Father and He loves them...that takes time. It is a process, not an event.
14. (The man on the street in Dundonald...Jesus hung as long on the cross for him as he did for me...God loves them just as much...God would hug them as readily as He would hug me...to... If

Jesus came to town, he would likely not even come to see me; he would go see the ones I didn't see, or whom I didn't love)

15. For a season, when we lived and worked north of Detroit, Michigan, I would end lessons with the two big admonitions: First, be like Jesus. Second, don't be stupid.
16. I want to change that as we transition from this period of fellowship with our friends around the world and get back to tending the gardens around us. First, bring into every room the peace that Jesus would bring if it were he, and not you, who enters it. Second, when you leave, leave the same kind and quality of peace behind that he would leave behind.
17. And don't just tolerate people. Forbear them. (King Conrad III and his siege of Weinsburg in 1140. They carried their husbands) When we carry each other, forbear each other, there is peace.