

Follow the Flight of the Dove

Introduction:

The world seeks peace as a priority. And peace is a good goal. The United Nations seeks world peace. Their flag shows a map of the world surrounded by two olive branches. The olive branch is a symbol for peace. In 1961 President Kennedy developed the Peace Corps – an organization also seeking world peace. The logo is an American flag with three stars – the star at the bottom if you follow it clockwise, turns into a dove. The dove is a symbol for peace.

The world seeks peace as a priority, a good goal - but the world has found peace elusive. The last century was the most violent century in human history.

I would guess that you too seek peace as a priority. You too have this as a good goal. You desire peace in your family - peace in your extended family – peace in your marriage – peace in your church – peace in your soul. I wonder if you too, sometimes, find peace to be elusive. We desperately want peace but the cry goes out, *“Where is peace to be found? Is peace even possible?”*

Those symbols of peace used by the U.N. and the Peace Corp point us to one book, don't they? The Bible. And they point us to one Bible animal in particular – to the dove. This morning we are continuing in our sermon series called, “God's Barnyard Theology.” We have together looked already at the lion and the lamb – the first couplet – the strong lion and the weak lamb. Last week we looked at the snake – the evil, tempting, punishing snake. And today we study its opposite – the peaceful, innocent dove. The Lion, the Lamb, the Snake and now the Dove, all point us to one person – to Jesus Christ.

Baptism of Christ – John 1:32-33

Please turn with me to our first text, John 1:32-33. We begin with the baptism of Jesus Christ.

John 1:32 And John bore witness saying, “I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.

John 1:33 “And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’”

I want you to imagine that you were in the crowd of people that witnessed the baptism of Christ. You see the crowd part, and the Baptizer turn to face a man, and you hear him say, “Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” You hear the image of the lamb and your mind is filled with the significance of that animal. And then they move into the Jordan River and as this man is baptized and you see a dove descend out of the sky and hover in the air over Jesus’ head. Not an Eagle. Not a Raven. Not a Lion. But of all of God’s creation, the Spirit takes the form of a dove. Why?

Now, imagine with me a boy named Jacob, who was there that day. Who saw the dove descend and hover over Jesus. Let’s imagine together what thoughts might have run through his head as he witnessed the baptism of Christ.

1) Creation – Genesis 1:1-2

Perhaps the first thing our Jacob would have recalled - as he saw the dove hover over the head of Christ - is the little village school that he attended outside of Jerusalem. Together with the other children he would have recited (Children join me), “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the

deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” Here the children paused, while the Rabbi added the customary explanation, “like a dove.”

Jewish tradition likened the Spirit of God hovering over the water – to the movement of a dove. The Spirit there at the creation of a perfect world where God and man would be a peace with one another. When Jacob looked to see the dove hovering over Christ’s head, he might have thought, “I wonder if God is about to do a new work of creation?”

2) Noah’s Ark – Genesis 8:8-11

As Jacob watched that Dove descend upon Jesus, he almost certainly have thought of the creation story, and the perfect peaceful world that God created. But a second story may well have come into his mind. A story about a flood and an ark found in Genesis 8:8-11.

You see the peaceful creation God made did not last. The snake came, and the was plunged into great wickedness – violence and not peace reigned supreme, and so God punished the world – with a great flood. And for 40 days and 40 nights Noah and his family road the waves of God’s punishment. At the close of that time, Noah sent a Raven out of the ark to determine if dry ground had appeared, and the Raven flew and flew but did not return to the ark. Then Noah sent out a dove – and the dove flew but did not find a resting place, but it returned to him, so Noah waited seven more days and sent her out again and she returned, “**And in her beak was a freshly picked olive leaf! So Noah knew that the water was abated from the earth.**” “Here was proof that in valleys where the olive trees grow, the flood-waters were subsiding. The earth was drying out and returning to her appointed seasons. God had made peace with man.” – Alice Parmele, *All the Birds of the Bible*, p. 56.

The olive branch would forever symbolize peace – peace in the beak of a dove. The image told Noah that the punishment was over. Now a new covenant could now be made – peace once more reigned supreme.

3) Sacrificial Dove – Leviticus 5:7

As Jacob watched the baptism of Christ, he thought first of the moving of the Spirit of God in creation – when the world was at peace, and then he thought of the sign of peace that God brought through the dove and the Olive branch – next, I almost certain he would have thought of one other thing – of his pet dove White-Tail which his father had bought him at the temple.

Months before he belonged to Jacob - White-Tail the dove was young and full of sympathy for others. One day he heard a cry and spotted a poor dove, perched on a tree. It was blind, staring ahead. White-Tail did not see that there was a string to one of its legs.

“I’m awfully sorry for you,” said White-Tail as he alighted on the same branch, while the bird flapped its wings. “Is there something I can do to help you?”

“White-Tail did not notice that as he spoke a hand was stretched out stealthily from the branches behind him, and before he knew he felt a man’s fingers grip him round the body. In vain he screamed, for in a moment he was flung into a bag along with a mass of other struggling doves. “That blind bird is a traitor,” they exclaimed! She was acting the part of a decoy!”

The captive birds were put into cages, and carried to Jerusalem to be sold. In the outer courts of the Temple there was a big market for them, because doves were used for sacrifices.

Poor White-Tail, cooped up in his cage was placed on a stall to await a purchaser – Jacob and his father came up at that moment to worship in the Temple, and because they were poor they were looking for a pair of turtle doves to offer in sacrifice.

“Look, what a beautiful dove, father; do buy it,” Jacob said, pointing to White-Tail.

The sum was very little and the bird passed into the possession of the man.

As they carried it away, Jacob’s father stopped and said, “We have made a bad bargain – this bird is not old enough to be sacrificed. See, I can pull its feathers out without drawing blood.

There was a law among the Jews that only doves of a certain age could be sacrificed. If there was a metallic luster around the neck – they were too old, and if in plucking the feathers no blood came out – they were too young.

Jacob said, “Then, father, let me keep this one as a pet – and thus White-Tail escaped death and found a new home with his master, Jacob.

When Jacob saw Christ baptized, he thought of his dove, White-Tail who represented the thousands of doves sold every year in the temple for sacrifice.

You see, the peace that God and man had after the flood did not last long. Humanity fell into sin once again. But in His mercy, God gave to His people Israel a way to restore peace through the sacrifice of animals. The death of the animal would pay the punishment of the sin of the animal owner – for a time. The main animal for sacrifice was the lamb. And if you could not afford a lamb, you could sacrifice a dove. **Leviticus 5:7 reads, “If he cannot afford a lamb, he is to bring two doves or two young pigeons to the LORD as a penalty for his sin.”** The Dove is the poor man’s lamb. Like the lamb, the dove brought peace to the people through its death.

God started with peace at the beginning of time, and man broke it. The dove brought the olive branch of peace after the flood and a new covenant is set up – and man broke it. And so God sent his Son, Jesus. Who was announced by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And the Holy Spirit identified him through the symbol of the dove. The lamb and the dove are the two primary sacrificial animals. As Jacob watched the dove above

Jesus' head and thought about the lamb, he was sad, because it seemed that this man was identified as a sacrifice. But then sacrifices bring peace – and so Jacob felt that there might be hope for the world.

Appliation

Let me ask you again – do you have peace in your life? Are you at peace with God. Are you at peace in your soul? Have you found peace? See if you identify with anyone in this video clip:

If you are looking for peace – let me assure you that it is not found within yourself. You may enjoy a type of peace, a temporary peace, if the circumstances are right – but true peace, lasting peace only come through Jesus Christ. The Bible says.

Rom 5:1 - Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Jesus said: John 14:27 - 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.

How do you enjoy that peace? Paul said: Phil 4:6-7 - Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. **Phil. 4:7** - And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Peter said: 1 Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on Him because he cares for you.

I will confess to you that I have not had much peace in my life the past several weeks - peace has been replace by worry, doubt and anxiety. And so on Wednesday afternoon I went to see my mentor John Reed who is 80 years old for counsel. He looked at me and with a steady finger to my nose he said, “Craig let it go! Let it go!” Upon the death of his daughter John Reed wrote these words:

One of the most difficult issues we face in life is the ability to let things go by turning them over to God. We pray, “Lord, this problem is too heavy for me. I am turning it over

to you.” Then we snatch the problem right back as if we had never said the words. The nasty problem of chronic worry destroys a Christian’s peace and often is a pathway to needless bouts of depression and unnecessary anxiety. Letting go of the past and moving by faith into the future is every day’s urgent challenge.

And so we have followed the flight of the Dove this morning to peace – peace between man and God through Jesus Christ – and peace every day of our life – if we will but let it go, and trust Him. Let’s pray.