Summer: A Season for Peace

The floods have passed but the scars remain. The heat has returned in full force leaving individuals gasping for fresh air. Summer in Memphis is upon us. How are you going to spend your summer?

As we conclude the Easter season with the feast of Pentecost, let's explore the gospel of John and take a moment to understand the guidance that Jesus provides as we move into our summer months.

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

With all of the weather-related tragedies of the past months, some of us may be feeling like the disciples, fearful and pessimistic about the future. Our normal lives may have been disrupted by tornadoes, floods and intense heat, with no relief in sight. Many of us may decide to emulate the disciples and to simply wait in anticipation of the next calamity.

However, this is not God's agenda for us! Jesus comes into our midst with the most simple of phrases, "Peace be with you." What does this mean to us in 2011? How can we enjoy the peace of Christ and furthermore, how can we offer that peace to others?

Let me suggest that we use summer, a season when many of us have more time to relax, as an opportunity to bring peace into our own lives and into those around us. Do the things that give you solace and that you have been putting off because of all of the demands of your work and family. Put away the powerful electronic gadgets for an hour a day and devote that time to peaceful endeavors, ones that truly bring you closer to God. Reflect on this wonderful world that God has given to us. Take a simple vacation or "staycation" where the demands on your time are minimized to the point where you can simply just "be" or read that book you have been putting off for lack of time. Don't text a friend, call him or her. Don't email a family member who lives close by, visit them. Simply enjoy being with them.

The message of Jesus is even more consoling as he gives us a gift that has been shown to make men capable of speaking in diverse languages, forgiving sins, and healing the sick, that is the gift of the Holy Spirit. If the gift of the Spirit can transform the disciples, just imagine what it can do for us. As we embrace this gift, we can become more in God's image and likeness.

Let me share Loren Eisley's beach story that I often tell to CBU students who are intent on fixing every societal issue. Eisley gives us a glimpse into a child's innocent approach and complete serenity with God's gift of peace.
I awoke early, as I often did, just before sunrise to walk by the ocean’s edge and greet the new day. As I moved through the misty dawn, I focused on a faint, far away motion. I saw a youth, bending and reaching and flailing arms, dancing on the beach, no doubt in celebration of the perfect day soon to begin.

As I approached, I sadly realized that the youth was not dancing to the bay, but rather bending to sift through the debris left by the night’s tide, stopping now and then to pick up a starfish and then standing, to heave it back into the sea. I asked the youth the purpose of the effort. "The tide has washed the starfish onto the beach and they cannot return to the sea by themselves," the youth replied. "When the sun rises, they will die, unless I throw them back to the sea."

As the youth explained, I surveyed the vast expanse of beach, stretching in both directions beyond my sight. Starfish littered the shore in numbers beyond calculation. The hopelessness of the youth’s plan became clear to me and I countered, "But there are more starfish on this beach than you can ever save before the sun is up. Surely you cannot expect to make a difference."

The youth paused briefly to consider my words, bent to pick up a starfish and threw it as far as possible. Turning to me he simply said, "I made a difference to that one."

As you make your summer plans, turn off the technology and reflect on how you can share the gift of God’s peace one starfish at a time.