

December 27, 2015
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A LIMP, NOT A RINGING
Luke 2:8-14

I saw a news report on the shootings in San Bernardino that I wish I missed. Part of the report included an interview with a man who had previously gone under cover in a radical jihad group for the CIA. After the Paris terrorist attack he had been interviewed and predicted that we would experience something similar in the United States within 2 weeks. Sure enough, exactly 2 weeks later it happened. He said, "This is going to continue. 2016 is going to be a bad year for us."

Well isn't that encouraging? Happy New Year! Unfortunately fear is all too prevalent these days. Chapman University conducted a survey of over 1500 Americans selected at random and asked them to rate their level of fear over 88 different things. The 10 that they most feared surprised me. They included government and corporate tracking of personal information, cyber terrorism, and identity theft. 6 of the 10 were basically unheard of 50 years ago! The survey revealed some surprising facts. More people were afraid of reptiles than of death, 33% to 21%. 22% reported they were afraid of loneliness. Almost 36 % said they were afraid of Obamacare.

There are a lot of things to fear. You may have seen the story of 24 year old Kelsey McClain from here in San Diego. She died on August 17. She was killed by a brain eating amoeba called that she contracted from swimming in the Colorado River. That was not the only case this year. Michael John Riley, a 14 year old from Houston also died from it. Experts say this organism is present in most lakes, ponds and rivers. Well that's comforting. Fear can paralyze us if we let it. As we enter a new year I'd like to bring a little bit of calm into your world this morning. I hope to encourage you by drawing your attention to one aspect of the message the angels brought about the coming of Messiah in Luke 2:8-14.

THE ANGEL BROUGHT GOOD NEWS

An angel, a messenger from God, suddenly showed up to a random group of shepherds who were tending their sheep that night. There was nothing special about this group. They were just farm hands. What a shock this must have been for those guys. They were doing what they always did, literally minding their own business, when suddenly they were confronted by a messenger from God. Every Christmas card I've ever seen that depicts the scene has angels up in the sky. To start there was only one angel and nothing suggests he was up in the sky.

This was probably a fairly small group of shepherds. Isn't it odd that God chose to announce the arrival of the long prophesied Messiah to a handful of anonymous shepherds? Israel had been waiting and hoping for hundreds of years for the great Messiah to come. Around this particular period of history there was great anticipation of this event. And God sends an angel to tell 4 or 5 shepherds about the news. The most momentous event in the history of the human race is broadcast to a small group of farmhands.

That's just nuts. Who was going to listen to these guys? Can you imagine the scene when some no-name shepherds came into town and started telling stories about having seen an angel who told them the Messiah had arrived? Yeah, dude, did the angels come in a ship that was kind of saucer-shaped? Did they take you up in their ship and do experiments on you? I wish God had a better advance team that could have handled the PR far more effectively.

Nevertheless the angel informed the shepherds that there was great news. The Savior, the promised Deliverer, had come. He had been born as a baby in the town of Bethlehem. The shepherds were not trained theologians. But they were good Jewish men and they knew some of the prophecies about the coming of Messiah. They thought they understood why this was good news. They were pretty sure this meant the baby who had just been born would grow up to be a new dynamic political leader for Israel. In fact, he would be the most powerful political leader the world has ever known.

This Messiah, would lead Israel in a campaign against Rome and he would defeat them. Israel would become the new superpower in the world replacing Rome. A whole new era of history would begin, an era in which wealth would flow into Israel. It would be a time of unprecedented abundance and success for everyone in Israel. Jerusalem would become the center of the world.

The only problem with all of this was that it was not going to happen. It was true that Messiah had been born and that someday he will rule over all the earth. But as we know now the life of this baby was not going to be about defeating Rome and making Israel the next superpower in the world. The Messiah would have much bigger fish to fry.

THE NEWS WAS BETTER THAN EXPECTED

At that point in history there was no way for the shepherds to understand the real meaning of the angel's message, but there were some hints of it in what the angel

told him. The angel said that the news he brought would be great news for all people. Likely the shepherds understood that to mean all Jewish people. But that is not what the angel meant. It was great news for all people everywhere, Jew and Gentile, Asian, African, and American, regardless of tribe, nation or race in every era of history.

That first angel was joined by a whole army of angels. Luke says that a “great company” of the heavenly beings showed up, praising God and saying, “glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” The expression, “those on whom his favor rests” according to Dallas Seminary Professor Darrel Bock is “almost a technical phrase in first century Judaism for God’s elect, those on whom God has poured out his favor.” The angels promised peace to those who experience God’s grace.

That peace would be associated with the Messiah is hardly surprising. One of the most famous prophecies about Messiah is in Isaiah 9: 6. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called wonderful Counselor, mighty God, eternal father, Prince of peace.” He will be the Prince of peace. He’s a ruler who brings peace. In John 14:27 Jesus, the Messiah, said, “peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.” In Acts 10:36 Peter is quoted as saying, “You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:1 says, “since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The practice of giving gifts at Christmas time is actually a reminder of the fact that God gave at Christmas. Our giving is supposed to be both a result of and a reminder of how God has given. John 3:16 says that God so loved the world that he gave us his son that whoever believes in him will not die permanently, but will have eternal life.

God gave us the gift of eternal life. That is the most precious gift one could ever receive. It is by far the most important and biggest gift ever given. However, God, in his goodness, grace and mercy, did not limit the gifts that he is given to us through his son to eternal life. The message these angels proclaimed was that another of the gifts that he came to bring us is peace. We can now be at peace because Jesus Messiah has come into this world.

I sometimes wonder what became of the shepherds. They encountered supernatural beings announcing a baby’s birth and saying the result of his coming would be

peace. But after that night what changed? Absolutely nothing. Life went on just as it had before. It is likely those guys later died never having had a hint of what it was all about. They never experienced the peace the angels promised. I wonder if we don't do the same sometimes. We have the big event of Christmas, the biggest celebration of the year, marking the coming of the Prince of Peace. But now, 2 days later, life just sort of goes on as it always has. I fear many have no hint of the peace Messiah came to bring. Life continues to be stressful and even frightening at times. Let's think about the peace that Messiah came to bring.

IMPLICATIONS

PEACE IS PRECIOUS

How big of a deal is peace? It's huge. In fact, it is what every human being is desperate for. We do not naturally live at peace. Researchers have found that when people have moments of quiet without distraction they typically find a sense of disquiet inside of them. There is a sense of unease, a lack of true peace. Writer Fran Lebowitz said, "There is no such thing as inner peace. There is only nervousness and death."

In his book, *Secrets In The Dark*, Frederick Buechner said, "Part of the inner world of everyone is this sense of emptiness, unease, incompleteness." His assertion is that every human being experiences a sense of unease and disquiet. It may not be acute but it is there. We may not even be able to identify why it is there but we sense it. In other words, we have a lack of peace.

In the *Peanuts* cartoon strip at one point Lucy says, "I hate everything. I hate everybody. I hate the whole world." Charlie Brown says, "But I thought you had inner peace." Lucy replies, "I do have inner peace. But I still have outer obnoxiousness." Everyone knows that if you have inner peace you are not going to have outer obnoxiousness. Lucy's little interaction with Charlie Brown actually gives us some insight into the human condition. Have you ever wondered why there is so much conflict in the world? Why can't we all just get along? That question gets asked because we can't! There is conflict everywhere you look in the human race. Get a group of human beings together and the normal state will be one of conflict.

When our kids were little they used to play with the other kids in the neighborhood. One of the chief features of their games was arguing. They often spent as much time arguing as they did playing. It was astounding to see how many things they could find to argue about. Yeah, but they were kids. Us grown-ups have learned better. Uh huh. Have you noticed how much jawing goes on in a

football game? Those guys are not shouting encouragement to each other or exchanging restaurant recommendations for after the game. Have you noticed how quickly the referees run to the spot where someone has been tackled at the end of the play? Do you know why? It's because they have to quickly separate the combatants lest a fight break out.

Would you say politics on either the national or international level is mostly peaceful? Sadly, it's not just politics. It's everywhere humans are together. It may be manifested in underground political maneuvering, or in the constant griping criticizing and gossiping that goes on in almost every group in the world. Or it may be open warfare. And it is there in families, neighborhoods, offices, teams, friendships, clubs, and nations. I recently read a statistic that both surprised and dismayed me, though really I shouldn't be surprised by it. It fits precisely with what I'm saying. It is that the overwhelming majority of Americans have someone in their life with whom they are not on speaking terms.

If Lucy hates everybody what sort of relationships would you expect her to have? Obviously they are not going to be very good. They're going to be full of envy, jealousy and anger. And the truth is that all starts with a lack of peace that is inside of her. We can't all get along because we lack peace. There will be no peace in this world because there's no peace inside human beings. We're not going to fix the world. Romans 12:18 says, "if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live in peace with all people." The words "if it is possible" are crucial. What does that tell you? It suggests to me that it is not always possible.

There was a scene at the end of the movie *Miss Congeniality* in which Sandra Bullock played an FBI agent who went undercover as a contestant in a beauty pageant that I think of in regard to this. Right at the end after she is given the award for miss congeniality and she is tearfully giving thanks, she says, "and I really do want world peace." Of course, we all do.

But we can't make that happen because that would require causing every single human being to have peace inside. However, what we can do as Romans 12:18 suggests is bring peace to our world. Don't you want peace in your marriage, peace with your children, peace with your friends, peace in your church, peace with coworkers and peace with your neighbors? Of course you do. We all do. That begins with you having peace in your soul. To the degree that you lack peace in your heart you will also lack peace in your relationships.

Toby and Anna have been mean to Laurie and me. They have insisted that we subject ourselves to some unpleasantness and pain. They said we had to get flu shots and shots for whooping cough if we wish to interact with their daughter, Leilani. I'm not a big fan of shots. This is not some big health issue about vaccinations; it's a matter of cowardice. I endure shots like a man, but the idea of sticking a needle into my skin has never been a big winner for me. The reason Toby and Anna required the shots if we either have or carry those diseases we can transmit them to Leia. They are highly contagious. Lack of peace is more contagious than any disease. If you've got it, you *will* spread it. It will cause you to behave in ways that inevitably will cause friction between you and other people at some level.

With no peace in your heart you will inevitably bring war into the world! So what that says to me is we need some sort of inoculation that protects us from lack of peace. And that is what that baby who was born in Bethlehem so long ago came to give us.

Peace is precious to us not just because it is necessary for us in order to have peace in our relations with one another, but because we are desperate for it in our own souls. When that baby born in Bethlehem grew up he would eventually say that he came to bring life in its fullest, best form to people. Can you have life in its best form if you have no peace inside?

Peace is binary. It is one or zero, on or off. It is like death and pregnancy. There is no mostly dead or mostly pregnant. If you're dead, you're completely dead. You cannot be somewhat pregnant. You're either pregnant or you're not. And you cannot be mostly at peace either. If you are mostly at peace then some part of you is not at peace.

When you are not at peace you are also not fully alive. Unease, anxiety, concern, worry are all synonyms for lack of peace. When you have any of them that anxiety, that lack of peace, eats away at joy, first of all. It distracts us and keeps us from being able to focus. It also inevitably interferes with our ability to love other people. Think of some occasion in your life when you were seriously anxious and lacking in peace. Maybe it had to do with a loved one who was sick or possibly making terrible choices. Or maybe your job was in jeopardy or your finances were imploding. Possibly it was because of a health issue. Maybe you were deeply afraid that it was cancer. Perhaps it is due to some relational conflict. During that season would you say you were filled with joy? Were you experiencing the best possible life? I doubt it. Have you considered the word "disease"? Notice what it

means literally. Dis-ease, means not at ease, or lacking peace. To lack peace is to be sick.

Peace is the necessary pre-requisite for joy. In fact, it is the foundation of a life that is life to the fullest. It is the necessary pre-requisite for being able to love others unconditionally instead of using them for your own ends and disguising it to make it look like love. Peace is one of the best gifts God could ever give you. It is so valuable that Frederick Buechner wrote that it is the treasure we all seek, the one that we would trade every other treasure to gain.

He's right. In his book, *The Rhythm of Life*, Matthew Kelly related a conversation he had with one of the richest men in the world. This man is a multi-billionaire. He has no real limits. He has homes all over the world, yachts, airplanes, the finest clothes and foods, everything he could ever want. He told Kelly, "I would trade all of it, all of my houses, boats, cars, planes, and money, just to be at peace."

HOW CAN WE EXPERIENCE PEACE?

Great, Rick, you've just spent all that time trying to convince me that I need peace. In one of the classic movie lines of all times in the movie *Jerry Maguire* Dorothy says to Jerry, "You had me at hello." You are probably saying, "You had me at peace on earth." We know we want peace. All of us do.

However, I stressed the need for peace because we adapt to our lack of it. I have mentioned before that for pretty much my entire adult life I have had a ringing in my left ear as a result of an injury I suffered in my younger days. If you ever get a ringing in your ears that doesn't quickly go away it probably drives you crazy. I don't even notice the ringing in my ear. If I stop and listen for it I can hear it, but I've adapted to it because it has been there so long. When the doctor told me the ringing would never go away I thought that was intolerable. How could I go through the rest of my life with that going on? Surprisingly it wasn't all that long before I didn't even notice it anymore. It literally does not affect me and hasn't for most of my life. We can do the same with lack of peace. It is with us so continually that we just accept it and adapt to it. The problem is it is different than the ringing in my ear. That doesn't affect me, but a lack of peace affects us. Think of it more like an injury that causes us to limp. We can cope by limping, but with that limp two things happen: first we are never whole and fully as effective as we could be, and second we are doing injury to some other part of the body. So it is with lack of peace. We are never really whole when we are not at peace, and we are hurting ourselves and others in some way.

Here's where the application really comes in. The angels promised peace, but many of us don't experience true, ongoing peace as a rule in our daily lives. We may say we're mostly peaceful, but as we have seen mostly peaceful really means we are not truly at peace. So how can we experience peace?

Know That You Have The Peace Of Christ

The angel claimed that the arrival of Jesus in this world meant there would be peace for people who live in God's grace. In John 14:27 Jesus said to his disciples, "My peace I give to you. I do not give you as the world gives." How does the world give peace?

Do you remember what happened on Easter Sunday about 4 years ago? In the afternoon we were having our Easter dinner with our kids and about 4 of their friends. That's when a 7.2 earthquake hit. Several of our kids' friends were not from California and had never experienced a quake. At the first jolt we didn't do anything, but then it kept on going and we all ran outside where we could be killed by tiles falling off the roof and hitting us in the head. Our friends were shaken, if you'll excuse the pun. Once it stopped they were more at peace, but now their peace was an unsettled peace. They knew they were safe for the moment, but for how long? They were only safe until the next quake hit.

It's like the time Laurie and I were on an airplane that went through a period of prolonged unpleasant turbulence as we were descending toward a landing. There was peace when we got off that airplane, but for how long? We were going to have to get on another airplane to fly home and the threat was there all the time. The world's peace is based on circumstances being better, on them providing some sense of immediate security. But that kind of peace is necessarily both tenuous and temporary. It can disappear in the blink of an eye, and it is never true peace for it is aware of how vulnerable it is. It is more like the cessation of immediate threat.

The peace of Christ is fundamentally different than that. Remember that Isaiah 9:6 said he is the "prince of peace." He is the one who rules and who is marked by peace. We might say of someone that we think is really dense, "that guy is the king of stupid." That means he is the very essence of stupidity, the top of the line when it comes to dumb. To say Jesus is the prince of peace is to say he is the very essence of peace, he is the top of the line when it comes to peace. Romans 15:33 says God is the God of peace, meaning he rules it and is the source of it. So to say the peace of Christ is in you is to say that an unlimited and unrestricted peace, the source of all peace is inside you.

It's not too hard to understand this. What disturbs our peace at some level always finds its roots in fear. We are afraid of the plane crashing, dying in an earthquake, losing something we value, being rejected, being worthless, and so on. The simple question one must ask is "what is God afraid of?" He is Almighty. He is Sovereign. He is not afraid of anything. Nothing threatens God. He exists at every moment in total peace. His peace is in you. Whether you are living in it at any given moment it is there to be tapped into and relied upon.

Let The Peace Of Christ Rule

Colossians 3:15 says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." It is there. It's in you if you are a believer in Jesus. That command is pointless unless we can decide. We have the choice to let it rule.

Let It Rule Spiritually

Peace is an internal thing. It all starts with our relationship with God. Philip Rieff is likely one of the most intelligent people you have never heard of. He was a professor of sociology at Ivy League University of Pennsylvania. He has written several very insightful books, perhaps chief among them one titled *My Life Among The Deathworks*. In a brilliant analysis of Sigmund Freud Rieff pointed out that Freud believed that all of the neuroses of modern western society stem from the loss of authority that resulted from rejection of God. Modern society insisted that God is not real and that created a vacuum. But Freud's moral bent and his therapeutic philosophy could not abide any authoritarian moral framework. Thus he sought not to restore faith but to teach patients to live without it. It was an effort doomed to fail. Rieff says the faith instinct, "simply cannot be killed." Rieff concludes that modern society's ills are caused by its attempt to reorganize by abolishing the sacred.

This happens at an individual level as well as the societal level. If we abolish God, if we remove him from the throne of our lives, neurosis, fear, lack of peace will result. We can only be at peace with God present and at the center of life. Romans 5:1 says, "since we have been declared righteous by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We have been declared righteous by God. The verdict is in and we have been given his approval. We have been given his total approval.

Hebrews 10:19 says because of what Jesus has done for us when he died we have confidence to enter into the very presence of God. Verse 22 says, "let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings." Here's

what God has arranged for us through the work of Jesus Christ. We can have confidence and draw near to God with full assurance.

One day when our kids were young they were outside playing. I was doing something with the car and it was part way pulled out of the garage. I went into the house to deal with something when I became aware that I could hear the garage door closing. My first thought was “that’s odd.” My second thought was “Oh no! The car is under the garage door.” I ran for the garage. Too late. The door stopped, but only after it had banged down on the car. Carissa was standing there with wide eyes. She said simply, “Toby did it.” For reasons that are still unknown Toby had hit the button to close the garage door, resulting in damage to the car. At that moment he was nowhere to be seen. He had run down the street and was hiding. The last thing he wanted was to get together with Dad.

The norm for humans is to go through life like that. We all have something to hide and we fear being confronted by God. We’d like to avoid him at all cost. And that sense makes peace utterly impossible. At the cross God removed that as a problem. In his mind you are now as pure as Jesus Christ and just as loved by him. Nothing you and I do can change that. So God is eager to see us. He longs for us to come to him and be in his presence. You never need fear that God is angry or upset with you. When he looks at you he sees the absolute goodness and rightness of Jesus, and that’s all he sees. So you and I can live at peace with ourselves and with him. We are loved unconditionally, accepted totally, welcomed absolutely.

Our acceptance before God, our living freely in his presence day by day is the necessary foundation to peace. As we live in fellowship with him we experience his peace and that is the basis for peace in all aspects of life. **Without that fellowship with him we will not be at peace. The level of our fellowship with God will be the level of peace we experience.** When we try to live independent of him all we accomplish is create disease, lack of peace, in our own souls.

Let It Rule Relationally

We have value not because we have proved it or earned it, but because God values us enough to pay an infinitely high price to have us as his children. Whether the world things we matter or not is irrelevant. When I walk into a restaurant no one notices and no one cares. People don’t look at me and whisper, “Look who it is. It’s him! It’s Rick Myatt. I can’t believe he’s here!” But if Laurie were in that restaurant hoping to meet me as soon as I walk in she’ll notice. In fact, she will totally light up. That’s because she loves me more than anyone else in the world. I could care less whether those other people notice. What matters is that she notices.

That's how our relationship is with God. He loves us and notices. It really doesn't matter whether other people do or don't. And that means we don't need to defend ourselves, promote ourselves, convince others of anything, prove anything. We can be at peace with God and with who we are.

This makes us able to be at peace with others because we don't have to compete with them or fight them. We've been taking care of Toby and Anna's dogs, Doc and Banjo, as Toby and Anna adjust to having a baby. One day I was in the back yard with the two of them. They were very peaceful, enjoying the smells in the yard and the sunshine. I was watching Banjo as he slowly moseyed along the back fence when a dog in a house down below us barked. He instantly came to alert, his whole body tensed, ready to spring into action, he barked and then he furiously began kicking his back paws along the ground, a way to mark his territory. It was obvious he was standing his ground and ready to claim and defend it.

It was kind of funny because that other dog was not going to get anywhere close to our yard. He was zero threat to Banjo. It occurred to me that's how we are with other people. We're peaceful, then another person that we perceive as a threat shows up. It may be that they say something that we think doesn't recognize our value or our importance, or they don't treat us with the respect and kindness we think we deserve, maybe they just aren't seeing our value, and we instantly go on alert. We are ready to fight, we want to stand our ground, mark our territory. In case you haven't noticed, that's not peace.

The peace of Christ is in you, and no human being is a threat. They cannot threaten your identity, your value or anything about you. In Christ you have nothing to fear from them and nothing you need to prove to them. So no matter what they do you can be at peace. In the peace of Christ you can forgive the slights or injuries they inflict upon you, instead of demanding they value and love you, you can focus on valuing and loving them. Regardless of what turmoil they have going on inside them you can operate out of peace and extend that peace to them.

Let It Rule Circumstantially

Of course the greatest threat to our peace is fear. There are so many things that can happen to us that are horrendously painful, or even just a little painful. A month ago I was at a doctor's office and had to get a shot inside my nose. It's not pleasant. The doctor put some stuff up there to numb it to some degree, but it's not completely effective. The whole time my body was tense. My blood pressure was up as I anticipated it hurting horribly. It was uncomfortable and that made me lack

peace, but the fear of it hurting terribly made me even more tense. And that's how we often go through life.

We can get the diagnosis we fear, we can experience rejection, we can lose jobs and experience terrible financial disaster, we can struggle with estrangement from a loved one. There is an unlimited pool of things that we can be afraid might happen. Unfortunately the Bible doesn't guarantee that God will keep that from happening to us. It assures us that God is protecting us from dangers far worse than anything we can imagine, but Jesus said, "in this world you will have trouble." And we've all experienced. We all have seen awful things happen to other followers of Jesus. How do we have peace in the face of the ominous threats in this world?

First, recognize that lack of peace is not from God. When we fear, when we grow anxious, when we are stressed, we need to recognize that the enemy is at work. Those things do not come from God. God is continually saying to us, "Do not fear." So when you feel that fear identify its source. Remind yourself that the enemy is trying to defeat you with it.

Second, live in the presence of Jesus. Remember that the Prince of Peace is with you. Picture yourself in the boat along with the other disciples and the storm is raging. You experience that fear. "We're all going to die!" And then you remember that Jesus is in the boat. The Lord of all creation is not going to die in a dumb storm on a lake. And if you're with him then you have nothing to worry about. In Psalm 46:10 God says, "Be still and know that I am God."

Finally, submit to him. Philippians 4:6-7 tells us to not be afraid or anxious, but to pray with thanksgiving and we can have God's peace. But that means handing it over to God in prayer and letting him determine the outcome. It means accepting his will. In fact, a big key to peace is submitting to God's purposes, living for his will. When we decide his glory is what matters most to us, then we can be totally at peace. Having a particular lifestyle, protecting ourselves, being comfortable, none of those is what our lives are about. Notice in Psalm 46:10 God says, "Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations." In other words, rest easy because the thing you make as the goal of your life, glorifying God, is going to happen.

If I make glorifying God, blessing people, bringing God's grace to every person and every situation, loving others what my life is about, nothing can threaten that. I do not need to fear. Actually having a bigger mission in life can bring us peace.

I read an article about a football player who is known for his toughness. As an example they told of how in college he broke his leg in a game, but kept playing. He was so focused on winning the game that he did not care about either the pain or the potential damage he might suffer. Peyton Manning is another example. He's had 4 surgeries on his neck, but he keeps playing football. The mission overcomes the fear.

I just read a biography of Stonewall Jackson called *Rebel Yell* that Brad Colbert gave me. It was fascinating. Prior to the Civil War Jackson was a college professor, and he was terrible at it. He was extremely awkward socially, painfully shy and was given to many physical ailments. He may even have been a hypochondriac. He was the last thing anyone ever would have picked to be a leader. Yet when war came it was like he became a different person. He was a brilliant military leader. He was dynamic and absurdly courageous, continually exposing himself to enemy fire without a hint of fear. And oddly, under the murderous stress of constant combat all of his physical ailments disappeared. He found a greater purpose that he could serve, and that set him free.

When we live for God's purposes we, too, will be set free from anxiety about ourselves, because our lives are not about ourselves. Francis of Assissi prayed, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace." What a great prayer. Let's make that our goal and our prayer as well.