

**Christ Our Peace**

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Kristen Brown

artisanchurch.com

[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Female voice]

So this morning I have the pleasure of introducing pastor Kristin Brown, who will be giving our sermon. Kristen was a pastor in Kansas City before moving to Rochester last Summer. She's Executive Director of Administration and Assistant Professor of Church and Mission at Northeastern Seminary and in her spare time she's also a Ph.D. student studying theological education and mission studies. Please help me in welcoming Kristen.

[Voice of Kristen Brown]

Which is really funny when you think about it because it's like you feel like you should say "Oh the Bible and Jesus" and those are definitely the right answers but the real answer is that we're going to have a conversation about Mr. Rogers and what he has to teach us about life in the Kingdom of God. Yes! OK. Has anybody seen the new Mr. Rogers film that's out there? If you haven't seen it get yourself to the Little. It is playing, I think it's still playing, if not it should be. But it is a great picture that I want to talk about a little bit today as we think about, we're going to look at a passage in Mark and we're going to look at a passage in Ephesians. But I want to think together about what life in the Kingdom of God really looks like and I actually think that Mr. Rogers has something deep and important to teach us about that. So before we get started I am going to pray for us.

God We are grateful to be here together this morning, we are grateful to be your beloved children, we are grateful to be reminded that you are making all things new and it is well with our souls because we are with you. We pray for this morning that we would be reminded of the kind of people you've called us to be. That we would catch a vision for what it is that you're up to in the world and how we participate in that, and that that in this time you would be active and present, your Spirit would be at work in our lives. We pray all this in the name of Jesus.

So I moved here to Rochester last summer as [unintelligible] mentioned and I moved into a great little neighborhood. I live in the North Clinton village neighborhood of the city, which I

love. Such a wonderful place to be. And it's hard when you move to a new city, you actually don't know very much about where you ought to be living so you rely on friends and people and my realtor and she's asking me what is it that you're really looking for? And I said my one not negotiable is that I have to have a garage I can park my car in because I'm scared of the snow in the Winter. I've heard stories of the amount of snow and that makes me very nervous but other than that I want to neighborhood that I can walk down the street and where people sit on their front porches where there are local restaurants that I can frequent and I feel like I got that in my neighborhood. I enjoy living there a lot. And then I went and I saw this film about Mr. Rogers and Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood. And I thought "Boy I don't live in that neighborhood quite" as much as I love my neighborhood there is a neighborhood, a picture of a community that Mr. Rogers was trying to tell us about. And the funny thing about it as I was reflecting on it later, so I'm watching this documentary about a children's television show with puppets and like no special effects and, you know, a little trolley that goes on out of the land called The Make Believe so we know it's not real and yet there is this deep sense, I think, in the theater, as I was walking out past people with tears streaming down their faces, that we want to actually live in the land of Make Believe, we want that to be our neighborhood. And what Mr. Rogers was doing in this children's television show was the very basic thing of saying human beings matter. People matter, children matter. Children are special. Children ought to grow up in a place where they are loved and know that they are needed and are welcome. And everybody should be in that neighborhood but there is room for everyone in this neighborhood. So he invites everyone to be his neighbor— "Won't you be my neighbor! I've always wanted to have a neighbor just like you! I've always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you." And this perpetual reminder that there is a space where we can be loved, where we are needed, where we are can be who we are. And that it's a space that we are made to be, I think. It's a it's a movie, it's a film I'm glad I saw in the theater, I'm glad I saw it with a community of people who you can see the physical reaction deep inside us that we actually are longing for this neighborhood and we walked out of the theater all knowing that we don't live in that neighborhood, that there are very very loud voices that tell us very different things. So our question is what does this Land of Make Believe have for us this morning. And I'm going to say that I think that Mr. Rogers was on to something, which he was a Presbyterian minister so it's not that surprising that he was on to something. And the thing I learned in this film is that the Presbyterian Church considered him a television Evangelist. Right! If only all of our television of Evangelists could be Mr. Rogers. Boy what a difference overall that could make.

But I want to say that I think he was right that he was on the right track and that the Land of Make Believe not only could be real but is real. That we are invited to live in this land, that's been created for us and we are invited into it. So that's that's the claim of the morning and I

want to look at a couple of texts that talk us-talk to us about that claim. We're going to start in Mark chapter 6. And there are actually four texts in the lectionary and you can actually read, I highly recommend you read all of them, all of them actually would tell us the story. We're going to look at just the New Testament ones this morning: Mark 6 and Ephesians 2. And I'm going to start with Mark 6 on page 818 in the red Bible in front of you. I'm not reading from the red Bible you'll notice, I'm not reading from the same version as the red Bible, so it's probably going to sound a little different but this is where all my notes are so I'm going to read from this one.

Starting in verse 30 of Mark chapter 6. Hear this: "The Apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all that they had done and taught..." they have been out and about so Jesus has been teaching them a lot of things and he just-he sent them out on their own to see like how much of this is really sticking in their world and they are just coming back and then because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat Jesus said to them: "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" and then we heard this morning in the children's moment what happened like their mobbed and they can't actually get away. "So they went to about themselves to a quiet place that many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He began teaching them many things." And then we pick it up again in verse 53 so and in the meantime He teaches them many things and He-they're there for a long time and they are getting hungry and so He gets bread and fish from this kid's lunch and He breaks and He gives it to them and feeds the entire multitude of people and then they try to get away again and again people follow them and we pick it up in verse 53. Says: "when they crossed over they landed at Genesareth and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat people recognize Jesus they ran throughout the whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard He was. And wherever He went into villages towns or countryside they placed the sick in the marketplaces, they begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak and all who touched him were healed."

So the amazing thing to me about this passage, which should not be amazing, but it is amazing is that people, people were flocking to Jesus. I don't actually see that happening as much right now as I kind of wish and I think it's because we sometimes don't meet Jesus and who Jesus actually is and was. We meet some representations that aren't maybe as close to the way of Jesus. But in in the story of Jesus that were told in the Gospels over and over and over again people couldn't get enough of Jesus. They couldn't get enough of what he was telling them about the way life ought to be. And the thing about the stories in the Gospels is that all the people who were flocking to Jesus were people that had been told bad news over and over and over again and in Jesus they found that the good news was good for them. It wasn't just good

for everyone else, it was good for them. So it's people like women, who had no place in society, are flocking to Jesus. People who are sick, and in in this time sickness was not just a physical ailment it became a social ailment and you were ostracized from your community, and in Jesus they're finding healing and community again. And he's not afraid of them and he's not afraid to go and be with people and to touch them and to eat with all kinds of the wrong people. He is, Jesus in his person is resetting the world. He's trying to tell us that the world is different than what the loudest voices have been saying. And people can't get enough of this. I think Mr. Rogers' neighborhood, the neighborhood he's creating, is tapping into something of this-of this kind of vision of a different reality that Jesus is talking about. Where people are well fed, and where the poor are blessed, and those who mourn are blessed where they find comfort.

You know the only people that weren't big fans, that weren't flocking to Jesus were people that had a lot of power. Were their religious elite, were people for whom the rules really actually were working for them, they were happy with the way things were, they weren't clamoring for time with Jesus. And as we see the story moving forward they get to the point where they've had enough of him and they decide that he can't be tolerated anymore— he's too subversive, he's changing too much, he's giving people too much hope. And so they do what they believe reality tells them to do, their world says death will end this and so they put Jesus to death; He dies a criminal's death. And that's the ironic twist in the story that we might be aware of that actually in their world death was the end of things but Jesus lived the alternate reality where death was not the end of things. And in the resurrection of Jesus the new world is coming into being and He has the first fruits of all that He had promised. He is the hope of a new world. And they had no category for that because their reality is this should have been the end of this. And it wasn't.

And that's the rest of the story of the New Testament. How does that reality come into being in the world? What does it really mean for us if we're going to live out the new life of the Kingdom of God that comes in the person of Jesus and in Jesus' resurrection? What does it mean to challenge and to live the alternate reality of God's kingdom? So that's that the second passage we're going to look at today is where Paul is trying to explain this to a church. And so most of the letters in the New Testament are written to churches probably not that dissimilar from ours that are placed in a very specific time and context and have their own issues that they're working through. And in this church in Ephesians they were having some struggles in recognizing the reality of God's Kingdom as good news for everyone. They were so used to living a particular religious way, right? And it was they were all for everyone getting on board with their way of life and they had no category that maybe what Jesus was doing was a new thing. And Paul is writing to that to let them know that these people who they've been keeping on the outside of their community have been welcomed in by Jesus and need to be welcomed

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in to this community. That God is actually just doing a brand new thing. So what Paul often does is help churches to get on board with the new thing that God is doing and this is how he does it for this church in the book of Ephesians. And I'll just read it to us and its entirety and make a few comments, maybe. And then we'll talk about what this church in Ephesians might say to our church here today.

So we'll start Ephesians 2 on page 590, says the screen. Ephesians 2, I'll start in verse 11 and we'll read through verse 22. So this says: "Therefore remember..." He's talking to the Gentiles here, those who have been sort of kept on the outskirts of this community that Jesus is forming. Says: "Therefore remember that formerly you who were Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision..." which then he clarifies and says "which is done in the body by human hands" is a human thing, is a human convention. "Remember that at one time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of the promise without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ" not by what anyone else is telling you but it's Jesus does that brings you near, you don't have to worry about that. You're with Jesus. And he says "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one, who has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing it-by setting aside the with his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. All the things that were being used against these people to keep them out of the community. Paul says "Know Christ is your reason for being in this community" He's setting these things aside. "His purpose is to create in Himself one new humanity out of the two thus making peace and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." And verse 17 I think is the key to the passage, he says "Christ came and preached peace to you who are far away and peace to those who are near." It there is a universal message of Jesus it is peace to those who are far away and peace to those who are near— We all hear the same message is the message of Peace to you. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. And he says "Consequently you are no longer foreigners and stranger, nobody is a stranger in God's household, you are fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone and Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a Holy Temple in the Lord and in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by a Spirit."

Paul is telling us that the life we have been fighting invited into as a life of peace in Christ. And when Scripture uses the word peace it's the Hebrew word shalom and it is more than just, you know, we're not in conflict with one another anymore— it's we live in a space of human flourishing where every person has all they need to be a flourishing human being, that we we

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are the people we were created to be and we are in a place where we get to be those people. And that's actually it's not that different from what Mr. Rogers was saying about his neighborhood and inviting everyone to come in and be a part. As the neighbor that they are, not having to be different than they are, coming in as they are. And Paul tells us that it's in Christ that this is possible because we gather around Jesus and what God is up to in the world is Jesus, that's our baseline. And we come in together and Christ becomes our peace.

So what do Mr. Rogers and Jesus in Mark and Paul in Ephesians have for us today as a church community as we think about what it means to live the peace of Christ in the world? And I guess one of the things the first the first thing I thought of was that I think in the world we live in today it has never been more necessary to be the peace of Christ to the world. There is very very very loud voices that are very very very divisive voices and it's not one kind of divisiveness, right? So I would say political divisiveness is a big one right now and there's a lot of Twitter screaming about things. And ethnic and cultural divisiveness is happening and we're we're watching just horrible things. And gender divisiveness is happening. So I don't know what what you feel in terms of the divides that you feel like you live in and I would say into all of that Christ speaks a word of peace and of the church is to be the community of peace to speak that word of peace into the world. That's the end of the passage in Ephesian is where it says "you are being joined together into a temple." The Temple imagery from the Old Testament as this is the place where God lived among God's people. And for us to be this manifestation of what God is up to in the world as what Paul is pointing to; that we get to be the put the space in the world that points to what God is doing. That that's the intention of that.

So in a world where that's not necessarily always happening and where the name of Jesus is invoked potentially sometimes not in ways that proclaim peace to those who are far away and peace to those who are near. What what could that say to us? I just I have two things that I think are a challenge and reminder. And the first one is this that from for Mr. Rogers one of the things I learned is the power of the small things where he spent decades doing thirty minutes of television to remind children of things that are just true, to remind all of us that we are loved, that we are cared for, that we are needed, that we are welcome. And he would do he would do small things that would respond to cultural moments. So in the 1970 in the summers when there was this sort of outbreak of people who were concerned about black children using their swimming pools and they would pour bleach into swimming pools to keep black children out of their swimming pools, that week Mr. Rogers has an episode where he invites the police officer, a black man to come and to cool his feet and his pool in the front yard and tell a different story to these children who are seeing what the world is like the violence of the world— Mr. Rogers is going to tell a different story for five minutes they might get the vision that there could be a different world. It's the little things of welcoming our neighbor, of learning and growing

together, of being OK not being OK. It was one of the other things that Mr. Rogers was all about that, I think, was and still is countercultural, to say it's OK that we're not OK; it's OK to be sad. That we can have feelings that we live in the world, right? That that's a very human thing to be. That silence should be a part of our regular lives. That slowness is OK. When he gave his acceptance speech for his lifetime achievement award at the Emmys, you know how those speeches go, they're like chock-full you just pack pack about you say all the things that you can possibly say because it's your you know one moment in the spotlight. And he actually stands up and says "OK for ten seconds, I'm going to time it, I just want us all to quietly think about the people who have loved us to being the people that we are, who have loved us and to loving" and he stands there for ten seconds in quietness and you look, you know it's panning around the room, and tears in people's eyes because how often does that happen in our world where we're reminded that we were loved so we can love? He did these small things for decades. I personally am a fast change person I like things to get fixed right away. And and the patience of the persistence of resistance that he demonstrated I think is something for me to learn from. What would it look like to continually live kindness, to continually live gentleness, to love one another, to help people understand that they are loved and needed and welcome.

So my first Sunday here was a year ago, almost exactly a year ago actually, and on my very first Sunday I met Laura Reed. I was sitting randomly and she came up and sat next to me and afterwards she said "What are you doing? A bunch of us are going to brunch, do you want to go?" My very first Sunday and I said "Sure! Why not?". So we went and got brunch with some other people and I met some people actually that I was going to end up working with and I had never met them before and it's a reminder that the small things actually make a big difference. Asking somebody to go get coffee says I see you, I know you're here with me physically present, you're welcome. Those things matter and the world that we live in I think they matter more and more. So walking down our street and saying hi to the people that live there sitting on their front porches because you know we get the Summer, right? To be out and about so we might as well use it for our advantage. Not sure what we do in the Winter but in the Summer we can definitely do that. In the Winter maybe we need to have people over for soup or something like that.

So that's the first thing and the second thing is actually what we have done here this morning and what we will continue to do here this morning every week. We gather together and we practice. We have these practices that sustain our imagination for a different way of life. So we do some actually odd things when you think about it. As a gathered community we live out the countercultural reality and some very specific ways and things like we, you know, we sing, we stand and we sing together and there are songs that remind us of what God is up to in the world. And the melodies maybe will be running through your head this week as they do with

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mine. You know this is where the the spiritual tradition comes in— we have a lot of songs that were that sustained a community of people who were enslaved, that reminded them that the narrative that they were being told was not true and that they could live a countercultural reality; that they didn't have to believe what was being told to them. Songs have this power to resist the narrative. So we do that, we gather every week and we sing these songs about a different kind of way of life. And we do things like we pass peace to one another. Every week we say “the peace of Christ to you” and in that we're saying “May the blessing of God be with you. May you live a flourishing life. May I contribute to that.” and we receive that back, that blessing back from each other and we are reminded that we were made to live in the peace of Christ and to live the peace of Christ in the world. We confess our shared belief we say “in this room together we have so many things not in common, we are so different and yet with people throughout time and around the world we hold these things together and they shape our imagination of what life can be like.” And we we didn't do it this morning but we do it a lot of mornings we confess our sins, we actually recognize that we are the ones who do the wrong. If only, if only the world could be a place where we started to pick up more mirrors and look out where we have gone wrong and and you know do a little bit less in terms of casting blame and really looking for how can we be contributing to the good of the world. So we do that, we practice that here, we confess our sins.

And then finally and we will do that this morning we join together at a table every week. And the table is an interesting place for us so Jesus gave us this. And it was common in that time who you ate with really really mattered and it still is today, it's not quite as stark as it was then but you could eat with all the wrong people and I mean it would you were tainted by who you ate with. So I find it very poignant that when Jesus left a practice for His disciples it was a practice of eating to remind us that who we eat at this table with is who we are at peace with in Christ because it's what Christ has done. That's why it's not our table, it's Christ's table and we just get invited to come to it. And because I have gotten invited as the wrong kind of person to somebody, I'm sure, I have to live an invitational life— I have been welcomed to welcome others. So we actually are going to we're going to do that this morning as we always do with the reminder that in this table we remember Christ's peace. And that we have been invited to partake of the peace of Christ, not to make it, but to live fully and to and to create spaces of peace for others.

So I invite you to this table in a minute. We'll come down the center aisle and we how we do it here is we take the bread and we dip it in the cup. You have to be a member here Artisan, at least they tell me that, I'm not a member and I take it every week so I believe it's true. You take both of them together but I want to just remind us about this table and about the story that brought us this table. So on the night that Jesus was handed over to suffering and death, He

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took bread, He gathered his friends in a room and his enemies, actually, in a room and He broke bread and He gave it to them and He said this is my body that's broken for you" and when He said you He meant everyone in that room— He meant the person who would betray Him later that evening. And then He took the cup and passed it and he said "this is the blood of a new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins." And there is no one who is not invited to this table. Anyone who wants to meet us in the peace of Christ is invited to come and meet Him here at this table. As often as we eat this bread and we drink this cup we proclaim our Lord's death and the peace that He brings us. So I invite you to come as you will and to partake of this, which is the good news of Jesus to us. Amen.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at [ArtisanChurch.com](http://ArtisanChurch.com)



