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**Hymn Meditation – “When Peace Like a River”**  
**II Corinthians 4:16-5:17 and John 14:23-27**  
**July 7, 2019**

**Read Mark 16:6-8**

*“Here is the place where the Ville du Havre went down.”* I’m not sure I would have wanted to know that. The sheer fact that my children had died, their bodies entombed in an icy ocean would have been heavy enough – to be told I was now possibly sailing right over top of them all but unbearable. How then a dad could be inspired, not to jump in those waters and try to retrieve his girls but to make the confession of faith Horatio Spafford did, a confession we know as the hymn *“When Peace Like a River”* is almost beyond my comprehension. Yet as we’ll learn in this series of sermons on great Christian hymns, it is often the worst of circumstances that serve as the chief - if not sole inspiration of their authors.

There was a woman in my previous congregation – her name was Peggy Kline. She and her husband Wally were blessed with three daughters – and had to bury two of them while the girls were still in their 20’s. So whenever in Bible studies the topic of death came up – Peggy, politely attentive and appreciative of the “theology” I was putting out, would calmly raise her hand and say *“pastor, all I can say is I just don’t know how someone can endure the loss of a loved one or face death without faith.”* *‘How do they carry on without Jesus and the resurrection’* – if I heard Peggy Kline say this once I heard it a dozen times.

All I could say each time was *“I don’t know Peggy”* – probably the most honest response I could offer. All you can do is grieve a death while at the same time hope that the writers of the gospel stories of the resurrection got it right. When I read in the history of this hymn that the captain of the ship Horatio Spafford was taking to England to join his injured and grieving wife took him aside and told him they were over the spot where his family’s ship went down – my initial response was *“why – what’s the point – how could this have helped.”*

Then I remembered what the angel said to the women in the resurrection story of Mark. How they peeked in the tomb and saw a ‘young man’ – who then told them *“See the place where they laid him. He is not here. He is risen!”* And I wondered if Horatio Spafford might have heard those very words – applied in his case to his little girls as he looked out over the sea billows rolling before his eyes – Maggie, Annie, Tannetta, Bessie - they are not here, they’re risen!

Peggy Kline was right - only if you believe the place where Jesus lay in his death is not the place he remained can a person say *“it is well with my soul.”* As a dad myself I can easily imagine Horatio and his wife Anna in their more ponderous moments

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*saying 'Oh, sometimes I stop in the midst of my workday and call out to them – some nights I wake and want to go into their rooms and pull the blanket over their resting shoulders – my bones ache to hold them and my mind creates another one sided conversation with them - but my soul, the deep down inside of me place where it's just me and God – that is well.'*

That's the peace Jesus offers. That's why Paul was so insistent we fix our eyes on what we can't see – even going so far as to use the analogy of eternal life as a ravenous animal 'swallowing up' our earthly lives with heaven. That is why Christians sing. Our songs do us good even and especially if what they rise out are not. In gratitude to God today for Horatio Spafford, and the confession of faith Christ awakened in him - we sing, "When Peace Like a River."