

Rooted 2021 Student Devotional: Peace When Life Looks Less Like a Small World and More Like Space Mountain

Disney's Space Mountain combines two things I hate: roller coasters and the dark. The very idea of launching up and down and sideways at breakneck speed without being able to see where I am going makes me want to puke. The last eighteen months of the COVID pandemic have felt a little like a ride on Space Mountain. If we can't get off the roller coaster, could we please just have a little light on what's coming next?

In the hours before his crucifixion, Jesus spends some time with his disciples shedding light on the challenges to come and encouraging them as to how he will help them through. John chapters 14-17, known as the Farewell Discourse, are rich with promises for the disciples that also apply to us. Let's take a look at just two of many:

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! For I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The first half of this promise doesn't sound so great. The disciples expect Jesus to establish a peaceful world order, and instead he is going to die a gruesome criminal's death. We, too, would be mistaken to think that following Jesus is going to insulate us from suffering.

Jesus doesn't lie to us, and he doesn't sugar-coat the future to entice us to believe in him. We can trust Jesus to tell us the truth: in this world, there is trouble ahead. I appreciate his honesty and I appreciate the warning. The nature of the trouble may take us by surprise (a global pandemic!?) but the fact of it does not.

Which is why we can also trust him when he says he has overcome the world.

Jesus overcame this world by living a perfectly sinless life, dying the death we deserve, and rising again to defeat sin and death for us all. If we believe in what he has done for us, and in the glorious future in heaven that he has secured for us, then we need not fear the inevitable troubles in the months and years ahead. We can actually enjoy the peace of Christ, even in this unpredictable life:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27).

Let's think for a minute about what Jesus is talking about when he says "My peace." He's pretty clear that his peace is different from the peace the world gives. We have all experienced tantalizing glimpses of what the world's peace might look like: a great report card, being accepted and liked, making your parents proud, holding your new girlfriend's hand, life just going according to plan.

But all of that peace is fleeting. You might get a great report card, but then comes the pressure of having to pull it off again next semester. You may be accepted and liked, until you annoy someone or do something uncool. You might do something to make your parents proud, which lasts until your sister does something even more awesome than you did. And just as you hold your new girlfriend's hand, you realize she is hanging out with you to get close to your best friend. By all accounts your life seems to be going according to plan, until a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic hits.

The peace of the world always depends on circumstances, which means it's never perfect (there's always something that could be better, right?) and it never lasts.

Jesus gives us the true and perfect peace he enjoyed, even in a life full of poverty, struggle, rejection, and betrayal:

- The peace of a clean conscience.
- The peace of an uninterrupted, always-loving, never-frustrating relationship with his Father and the Holy Spirit.
- The peace of knowing he was perfectly loved in every moment.
- The peace of knowing he was enough.
- The peace of loving all the imperfect people around him without jealousy, irritation, or resentment.
- The peace of knowing his future was in his Father's hands.

That's not the kind of peace any of us can work up for ourselves, but it is the peace that Jesus died to give you and me. Pitch-dark roller coaster notwithstanding, our hearts need not be troubled or afraid. We find peace in the promises of our trustworthy Savior.