

Earlier this year, two coworkers—let's call them Jordan and Rina—were working on a project together.

They liked each other well enough, but they weren't close.

Both were under pressure.

Both were tired.

Both were carrying more than anyone around them could see.

One afternoon, Jordan sent a quick email to clarify a deadline.

He typed it fast, didn't reread it, hit send, and went to his next meeting.

When Rina opened it, she read the tone as sharp—borderline condescending.

Her stomach tightened.

Her face flushed.

She thought, "Why is he talking to me like that?"

So she fired back a short, clipped reply—

nothing overtly rude, but clearly not warm.

When Jordan read her email, his chest tightened too.

He thought, "Wow. That was uncalled for. She doesn't respect me at all."

Both walked out of the office that day irritated, replaying the emails in their heads, each convinced the other person had bad intentions.

Have you ever been in that place?

And then one of a few things happens:

- *We put that person in a box*: “I’ll work with them, but I will not like them.”
- *We stay strictly professional*: polite but distant.
- *We withdraw*: keeping as much emotional space as possible.

OR — sometimes — another possibility presents itself.

The next morning, Jordan picks up an extra muffin on the way to the office and approaches Rina:

“Our email thread got a little tense yesterday. I’m sorry my email sounded harsh — I think stress got the best of me.”

Rina exhales.

“Honestly, I was overwhelmed and I read your email the wrong way. I’m sorry.”

And suddenly, the air loosens.

The story changes.

Peace finds a foothold.

Not because someone was right and someone was wrong.

But because someone chose curiosity instead of assumption.

Someone chose presence instead of defensiveness.

Someone made a little room.

I believe that to be a Christian one must pursue peace.

Peace is both a calling and a promise—

both something we seek and something God is bringing to life in us and among us.

Peace—shalom—is the very shape of the Kingdom of God.

Yet fear is the noise we live in.

We live in a world that trains us to pursue other things:

pleasure, productivity, security, entertainment, comfort, control, self-sufficiency.

We are taught that survival depends on guarding ourselves,

protecting our image,

managing every outcome,

staying one step ahead of whatever might hurt us.

Underneath all that striving is fear.

Fear is so often the root that crowds out peace.

And yet peace—true peace—is what begins to quiet fear.

Advent is the season when we learn to wait for God's peace to break into a fearful world.

Advent is the story of peace coming—not after fear is gone,

but right into the middle of it—

into uncertainty, into vulnerability,

into a world ruled by empire and anxiety.

Into into a world bracing for the worst—
God comes as Emmanuel, the Prince of Peace.

Have you ever noticed in the Christmas story how often we hear the phrase “Do not be afraid?”

Gabriel appears to Mary with astonishing news that she is pregnant—and says, *“Do not be afraid.”*

Just a few verses earlier, Gabriel appears to Zechariah (to tell her Elizabeth is)—*“Do not be afraid.”*

In Matthew, an angel comes to Joseph in a dream—*“Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife.”*

Out in the fields, the shepherds hear—*“Do not be afraid, for I am bringing you good news.”*

Fear is not a failure;
it is a universal human response to vulnerability, uncertainty, danger, loss, and risk.

And fear is not just an emotion—
it is a biological response.

Our heart speeds up.
Our breath grows shallow.
Our focus narrows until all we can see is the threat in front of us.
Fear tightens the body and constricts the imagination.

Fear shows up

in our bodies,

in our relationships,

in our imagination.

Which is why, again and again,

before the good news even has a chance to land,

the angel/the messenger says

“Do not be afraid.”

Because peace begins right in the middle of where fear lives.

Peace isn’t the absence of fear, it is the nearness of God.

Therapists use a phrase to describe what happens when fear overwhelms us:

“flipping your lid.”

It’s what happens when the part of the brain responsible for reasoning, compassion, imagination,

and connection goes temporarily offline.

Fear throws us into survival mode.

And when we are in that place, we lose access to what many call the “wise mind”—

the grounded, thoughtful part of us that can respond rather than react.

Survival mode usually shows up in one of three ways:

Fight – we get defensive, reactive, irritable

Flight – we avoid, shut down, escape

Freeze – we go numb, stuck, unable to move forward

When we're in these states, we're not operating from our fullest, truest selves.

We can't access wisdom, creativity, empathy, or clarity.

We lose our ability to imagine anything outside the immediate threat.

Fear literally shrinks our capacity to receive good news.

We all respond differently to fear—

part genetics, part experience, part personality, part circumstance.

Sometimes fear is triggered by something immediate—

a sharp comment, a sudden sound, a medical scare—

and we flip our lid and go straight into fight, flight, or freeze.

And other times, there isn't a monster in the closet at all—

it's just that we've learned to see the world through the lens of fear.

Fear becomes the filter, not the moment.

Here's the challenge:

We don't always recognize when fear is driving us.

We think we're being reasonable.

We think we're just being careful.

We think we're just protecting ourselves or the people we love.

But we may have already shifted from a lens of peace to a lens of fear without even knowing it.

I'm not someone who usually thinks in worst-case scenarios. Are you?

But sometimes, late at night, I'll look at my children sleeping—utterly peaceful, breathing slowly—

and suddenly waves of fear wash over me:

What if something happens to me, and I'm not here to raise them?

What if they need me and I can't get to them?

What if something happens to them—I couldn't survive that.

In those moments I want to wrap my kids up and never let any of us leave the house —keep us all safe from harm.

Fear comes from the parts of us that care the most.

Fear shows us what we love.

This is why self-awareness matters.

If we don't pay attention to what is happening inside us, we may not even recognize when fear is in control—when our imagination has narrowed, when our compassion has receded,

when we have shifted from peace to fear
without even noticing.

And fear doesn't just live inside individuals.

Fear doesn't stay in our bodies or our private thoughts.

Fear gets woven into the fabric of our relationships, our communities, and eventually into the systems we build.

Fear shapes the choices we make as neighborhoods, as nations, as cultures.

Fear gets written into policies and institutions.

Fear becomes the logic behind how power is used, how borders are drawn, how resources are allocated, how justice is defined.

And if we look honestly at our world, we can see it:

Because at their core, wars are about fear.

Fear of loss.

Fear of difference.

Fear of vulnerability.

Fear of scarcity.

**Fear that convinces entire peoples that the only way to be safe
is to strike first, dominate, or destroy.**

Fear narrows imagination until violence feels inevitable.

Fear says:

There is not enough.

There is no room.

There is no other way.

Which is why Isaiah's vision is so astonishing—

so disruptive, so countercultural, so hopeful.

The prophet Isaiah dares to imagine a world not governed by fear.

A world where wolves and lambs rest side by side.

A world where predators no longer attack.

A world where children play in places once defined by danger.

A world where weapons become garden tools.

A world where no one hurts or destroys anymore.

Isaiah is offering **a vision of a world reordered by peace instead of fear.**

It sounds impossible—because fear has trained us to think it is.

But Isaiah insists:

Another world is possible.

A world shaped not by fear but by the presence, justice, and peace of God.

Can you imagine a world like Isaiah's?

A world where Palestinian and Israeli children
can play on the same streets
without fear.

A world where Black and brown teenagers
can walk through their own neighborhoods
without being seen as threats.

A world where LGBTQ+ youth
are not afraid in their own churches or families.

A world where refugees are welcomed
instead of turned away.

A world where mental illness is met with compassion,
not shame.

A world where police are trained in de-escalation,
where prisons don't profit from bodies,
where violence is not normalized or politicized.

A world where the tools of destruction
become the tools of repair.

Can you imagine *your* world becoming this one?

Peace begins the way Advent always begins:

with someone making a little room.

with angels saying again and again,

“Do not be afraid.”

And then Jesus is born and

God shows up not with a sword,

but in baby.

Not to bomb our way to peace,

but to show us what peace looks like. How peace shows up.

a city not too different from ours began debating whether to adopt a “welcoming city” resolution

a simple statement saying that all residents, regardless of immigration status,

could access city services without fear of being reported,

and that local police would focus on local safety, not federal immigration enforcement.

Before the council even met,

before any data could be presented,

before anyone listened to the families who would be most affected —

fear had already taken the microphone.

People packed the meeting room.

Neighbors sat on opposite sides of the aisle.

Some clutched signs.

Some clutched statistics.

Some clutched their fear.

One man stood up and said,

"If we do this, crime will skyrocket."

Never mind that immigrants in that city had lower crime rates than U.S.-born residents.

Another said,

"They're going to take our jobs."

Never mind that many of the immigrants worked jobs no one else applied for.

Someone else said,

"We don't have enough resources for our own people."

Never mind that immigrant families were already contributing to the tax base,

already running essential businesses,

already a vital part of the community's economy and culture.

Fear had written the narrative long before truth had a chance to speak.

Meanwhile, just a few rows behind them,

a mother sat quietly with her two children,

holding the paperwork from her job, her tax record

the keys to her apartment,

and the letter from her daughter's school —

proof that she was doing everything she could to build a life,

to contribute,

to belong.

She didn't stand up to speak —

because fear had already told her what would happen if she was seen.

She held her son's hand a little tighter.

In that moment, you could feel two worlds drifting apart:

The world governed by fear — suspicious, guarded, shrinking...

and the world governed by peace —

where neighbors are treated as neighbors,

where people are seen before they are judged,

where the community's strength is measured by the well-being of the most vulnerable.

Fear said,

"There is not enough.

There is no room.

There is no other way."

And because fear had been given the first and loudest word,

the resolution failed.

Not because it was impossible.

Not because it lacked support.

But because fear had convinced too many people

that welcoming others was dangerous.

That difference meant threat.

That scarcity was the only reality.

Fear won —

not by violence,

but by imagination.

Fear always shrinks the world

until compassion no longer fits.

And this is where Advent speaks the loudest:

To be a Christian is to pursue peace—

not the peace of avoidance or silence,

but the peace that refuses to let fear have the final word.

This is the work of Advent:

to notice where fear has taken up too much room

in our bodies,

in our relationships,

in our community,

in our world—

and to dare to believe that peace is possible there.

Peace is not something we wait for passively.

Peace is something we *practice*—

in the way we listen,

in the way we breathe,

in the way we tell the truth with gentleness,

in the way we make room for those our world pushes to the margins.

When we practice peace in our own bodies,

we become steady enough to hold peace for others.

When we practice peace in our relationships,

we widen the space fear tried to shrink.

When we practice peace as a community,

we become a sanctuary where all can breathe again.

And when we practice peace in the world,

we participate in the very work of God—

the work Isaiah saw,

the work the angels sang about,

the work the Christ child came to begin.

So this Advent, may we become people who make room—

room in our schedules,

room in our imaginations,
room in our hearts,
room in our pews,
room in our systems,
room for the peace God is longing to grow among us.

Do not be afraid.

Peace is near.

Peace is possible.

Peace is already on the way

Amen.