

12/8/2019

“Peace . . . from Above and Within”

Scripture: Isaiah 11:1-10; Luke 1:57-60, 67-79

Second Sunday of Advent

Series: “Sharing in a Life-Giving Christmas”

Theme: Although “peace” may be elusive at times, even (or especially during this season), the good news is that peace is possible. And the Bible tells us how.

Last week we considered “Hope . . . Life Can be Different.” This week we will consider PEACE . . . from Above and Within.”

When I think of the word “peace”, I often think of my father. Coming home to a family of five kids after a long day of treating patients and making visits, if we got a little too loud or wild he would sometimes exclaim, “For the love of Christ, Can’t we just have a little peace and quiet?!” ☺

What comes to your mind when you think of the word “peace”? – most likely a few different things.

That’s because, as Webster’s New Dictionary defines “peace”, it has several meanings:

1. Freedom from war
2. An agreement to end war
3. Law and order
4. Harmony, concord;
5. Serenity or quiet

And Wikipedia has an even broader or more inclusive definition, which reflects more qualities as expressed in the Bible:

“Peace is a period of harmony between different social groups that is characterized by lack of violence or conflict behaviors, and the freedom from fear of violence. Commonly understood as the absence of hostility and retribution, peace also suggests sincere attempts at reconciliation, the existence of healthy or newly healed interpersonal or international relationships, prosperity in matters of social or economic welfare, the establishment of equality, and a working political order that serves the true interests of all.”

Wow! That’s a mouthful.

As I said, all of these meanings of peace are found in the life and times of the bible, as well as throughout history, including our present world. With each of these various definitions, peace seems to be something so elusive to our personal and communal lives.

Let me ask, what keeps you from experiencing peace in this season or in your life?

Perhaps, its things like violence and mass shootings, even in schools, military bases, and commercial centers. It could just be the way people treat each other in society. Maybe it's more personal, like bullying or other relationship issues. You might have a problem with someone at home, work or other place. Maybe it's mental or physical health concerns for you or a loved one.

So, is peace possible? And if so, how?

The good news is that peace is possible. And the bible tells us how.

The people of God living in the times of the prophet Isaiah longed, as we do, for a world of peace. Isaiah prophesied of a great ruler to come for the people of Israel. He would be a descendent of King David: a child who would lead his people in righteousness, faithfulness and justice . . . led by the Holy Spirit. . . with wisdom and understanding . . . counsel and might . . . with the knowledge and fear of the Lord.

And not only would there be peace for the people of Israel, but for all of creation once again. We may, as Christians before us and present, interpret this passage as speaking in part of the birth and earthly life of Jesus. As the multitude of the heavenly host praised God at Jesus' birth, "*Peace on earth, goodwill among people.*" (or "*to those whom he favors!*" NRSV)

Yet certainly, these are things that have not yet been fully realized, and speak of times to come with Christ's return, when he ushers in the fullness of his kingdom on earth.

And perhaps just as significantly, I believe these verses can be applied to our personal lives here and now. I know they have made a difference in my life.

† **We can find peace – from above and within – as we seek to let Christ into our hearts and lives and “guide our feet into the way of peace”.**

As (Rev. N.) Neelley Hicks says, “Peace exists within the kingdom life, but we don't have to wait for that life as if it were a distant dream. Putting into practice the way of peace will manifest peace in our lives and the world. We will find peace with God, peace with others and peace in our actions – from home to communal life, and far beyond. We will experience a deep, abiding sense within that we know our purpose, and that by God's

grace we will live into God's dreams for us." (A Life Giving Christmas: Week Two; RETHINK CHURCH, 2010)

With all that's going on in the world and around us, along with the pressures to prepare for celebrating Christ's birth, it might be best to consider the life of Zechariah and Elizabeth, who in their old age, awaited the Messiah, the coming redeemer of their people.

They were told by an angel of the Lord that they would have a child who would be the forerunner of the Messiah, the Christ. His name would be John. And when John was born Zachariah declared these words over him (Luke 1:67-79 NRSV). As Luke tell us:

"Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

"Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.

"By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

I believe that peace is meant for all peoples of the earth. But our feet must be guided by God, by the Holy Spirit, as lived by Jesus.

And certainly, we can find peace – from above and within – as we seek to let Christ into our hearts and lives.

I agree with our reading of "Peace – True Peace" this morning by Jean Mallette that peace does not rest in other men or women, as we might know them, and that it cannot be forced upon us by anyone, even as the Roman Empire and countless governments have tried. And I agree that Peace – true Peace, begins within oneself. Yet I agree with the Bible, that it comes from above, as a fruit of the Holy Spirit, as we let Christ rule in our lives.

As Mallette says, "pray . . . Then you will know what Peace is of – Defeat of Hate, the reign of Love."

So open your heart and mind, receive the peace of Christ from above and within.

† **We can help others know that peace as well, by how we think and act.**

Advent and Christmas are wonderful times to not only find Christ's Peace for yourself, but also to share it with others.

We can do this by keeping Jesus the main character in Christmas. Imagine you are a stagehand for Jesus. Your only role is to set things up for Jesus to be seen, heard and experienced.

What will you do? How will you focus the spotlight? How will you elevate Jesus? What kind of mood will you create so Jesus is best received?

“If we were to live as Jesus' stage-hands, how would we build a “set” for peace? How would we live our lives as part of that “set”?”

Truly, this is what we do in worship. We set the stage for Christ to be honored. We can extend this mentality into our daily lives. The more we focus on Jesus, the more peace we will find. The song, “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” eloquently points to this truth:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus
look full in His wonderful face
and the things of earth will grow strangely dim
in the light of his glory and grace.*

Things we can do to help turn our eyes upon Jesus might include listening to carols or other peaceful or uplifting music, taking a walk, reading or meditating upon related scriptures for the season, burning a candle or even some frankincense, myrrh or other relaxing fragrance.

“Reordering our lives with that focus in preparation for Christmas and the coming year should include intention for those things that make us both receivers and givers of peace.” (Ibid.)

If you want to share in a life-giving Christmas of Peace this year, let me encourage and challenge you to be a stagehand for Jesus, or a forerunner for Christ, as John the Baptist was, giving light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, walking in and guiding other's feet into the way of peace.

Here are a few more suggestions:

Think of a situation where you desire peace, either in your life or in the world. Prayerfully ask God to guide you in doing something this week to strive for that peace. It could be writing a letter to someone from whom you have become separated.

You can refine your own inner peace through outward action. Practice peace. Where you hear gossip, offer a good word. Where people experience broken-ness, do what you can to bring wholeness and healing. Where sickness and death prevail, offer a moment of life's joy or simply be by someone's side.

If you have tumultuous relationships in your life, do what you can to bring about peace (Romans 12:18). Pray for your enemies as Jesus taught, that they may be blessed and find peace by trusting that God knows their deepest needs.

If you know of someone who is struggling with spiritual turmoil, anxiousness about life or death, or searching for deeper meaning to life's challenges, take the time to listen and pray with them. Offer a copy of the Upper Room or other devotional booklets.

Listen to others. To find peace, people need to feel heard and to know they are not alone in their suffering. Infuse the conversation with God's grace, perhaps sharing today's Scripture. **Let the hope and peace of Christ assure you that no matter the situation, peace can prevail.**

Be mindful of others as you shop during this season. The Holy Spirit may lead you to someone who has a deeper need for inner peace than they do for money to buy presents.

Invite people to worship with you. Connecting your actions with following Jesus may stir curiosity in people who want what you have. **Let others know that through Christ, people will find peace and hope.**

Above all, be mindful of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which gives you peace through our Lord Jesus Christ -- even a peace that passes understanding -- **so that you may go forth to share in a life-giving Advent and Christmas this year!**

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Questions for Reflection:

What keeps you from experiencing peace in this season or in your life?

What can/will you do to let your "feet be guided" by Jesus into peace?

How can/will you journey with and/or assist others to come to peace?