

December 7, 2025 + 10:30 A.M.

Second Sunday of Advent

We Join in Worship

If you need extra space for a wheelchair or walker, or if you have young children with you, please feel free to make use of our Prayground, the extra space across the aisle from the sound booth.

Liturgist: Carol Callaway

PRELUDE

The Advent Star

Gilbert M. Martin

WELCOME

CHORAL INTROIT

ANNOUNCEMENTS

*THE PEACE OF CHRIST

*LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH Peggy and Rodney Fozkos

Leader: On this second Sunday of Advent, we light two candles, illuminating God's truth. Our first candle was for HOPE. Today, our second candle is for PEACE. God promised a messiah who would transform the world so that the lion shall lie down with the lamb and weapons shall be forged into plowshares. God promised us the Prince of Peace.

ALL: **The Prince of Peace said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."**

(the first and second purple candles are lit)

Leader: God dares us to dream of a world without weapons and wars. God invites us to imagine communities of wholeness, no longer broken by the many forms of violence. As we continue our journey through Advent, let us dream and imagine together!

ALL: **Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!**

* CALL TO WORSHIP (Adapted from *Psalms* 72)

Leader: May our king live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.

ALL: **Blessed be the LORD, who alone does wondrous things!**

Leader: In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more. May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

ALL: **Blessed be the LORD, who alone does wondrous things!**

Leader: For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the lives of the needy.

ALL: **Blessed be the LORD, who alone does wondrous things!**

Leader: From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight. Long may he live! May prayer be made for him continually, and blessings invoked for him all day long.

ALL: **Blessed be the LORD, who alone does wondrous things! Blessed be the LORD's glorious name forever; may the LORD's glory fill the whole earth! Let us worship the LORD!**

***OPENING HYMN:** “On Jordan’s Bank the Baptist’s Cry” (10)

INVITATION TO CONFESSION:

Leader: John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness and proclaimed, “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven has come near!” Together let us confess our sins and repent to the Prince of Peace.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (unison)

O God, we open our hearts and lift up our voices in communal confession to you. We confess that that we have lost our way as the people of the Prince of Peace. We maintain silence in the face of gun violence in our streets, in our schools, in our places of work, in our places of leisure, and in our sacred spaces. We close our ears and eyes to the cries and pain of communities engulfed in endless war. We contribute our material and spiritual resources to the perpetuation of those wars. We value weapons over Wisdom. We actively choose death over life. With all of this dissonance, we are unable even to find peace within ourselves, let alone peace with others. Forgive us. Help us to do and be better. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, we pray. Amen.

KYRIE

Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Leader: Friends, hear the good news. The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him we have hope.

ALL: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven! Hallelujah! Thanks be to God!

GLORIA PATRI

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

STATEMENT OF FAITH (*The Apostles’ Creed*)

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

We Hear God’s Word

EMBODIED WORD FOR DISCIPLES OF ALL AGES

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

God of all creation, send your Holy Spirit among us this day, that the seed of your Word might take root in our hearts and bear the fruits of hope, peace, joy, and love. Amen.

HEBREW BIBLE LESSON: *Isaiah 11:1-10*

EPISTLE LESSON: *Romans 15:4-13*

GOSPEL LESSON:

Matthew 3:1-12

SERMON:

Growing into God's Peace

MUSICAL MEDITATION:

Breath of Heaven

Amy Grant

We Respond in Faith

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

INVITATION TO THE LORD'S TABLE

If in the depths of your spirit you are crying out, "Come thou long expected Jesus;" this table has been laid out for you. For those who sing, "born to set your people free," the table of the Lord has a place for you. If your heart aches to be released from fear and despair, receive the bread of Heaven and the cup of Salvation. Come, find your rest in Jesus Christ. The feast of communion is prepared for you. Come, taste and see that the Lord is good.

GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:

Leader: The Lord be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

ALL: We lift them to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

ALL: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

You are our life, O God, our hope from the beginning of time to the end of the age. In your presence, water springs from dry ground, grapes hang heavy on the vine, and grain abounds in valleys of peace. Your word brings joy to the desolate, and your steadfast love awakens even those who are sleeping in death. Therefore, we who cling to your promise and wait for a Child to lead us, a light to guide us, an incarnation to transform us...raise our hearts to you, and with everything that lives, we proclaim your endless glory as we say:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in your holy name. Hosanna in the highest.

In your holiness, you could have stood apart from us, God of compassion and hope, but in your love, you came to us as a child to be one of us. When we struggle in despair's depths, the child of Mary enriches us with hope. When we are weakened by fear, the child of Mary fills us with courage. When we are lonely, the child of Mary joins us and communes with us. When death thought it had the final say, life came back in the resurrection to give hope to all forever. With all those who are waiting for the child of Mary, the source of hope, we say:

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again!

God, you poured your Spirit on Mary and she sang words of defiance and hope. You poured your Spirit on Zechariah, and he prophesied about the messiah Jesus and about the prophet of the messiah, his son John. You poured your Spirit upon John, who prepared the way of the Lord. Pour out your Spirit upon us gathered here. As we eat and drink may we know your presence. As we eat and drink may we be opened to the possibilities of your hope and power, and may we be strengthened in our time of waiting and struggling for peace and justice so that we will have the courage to make the Christmas promise a reality. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Our Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest, took bread, and after giving thanks to God, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup, saying: This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me. Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the saving death of the risen Lord, until he comes.

COMMUNION OF THE PEOPLE

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

God of pregnant expectations, God of child-like hope, we have eaten and drunk from your table. May the eating and the drinking fill us with hope in a world of despair. May we be beacons of hope and prophets of peace as we wait for the day when the world will be transformed. Grant that this taste of your banquet which is to come would give us the hunger for peace and justice in our community and around the world. Amen.

OFFERING INVITATION:

Leader: Christ is the Prince of Peace. As we continue our journey through Advent in a world plagued by violence in its many forms, it is necessary that we bear the light of peace with courage and hope. Let us give our tithes and offerings with peace in our hearts so that we can do so. Please place your offering in the plate as it is passed. If you are worshiping from home, please mail in your checks or use our online giving option on the website. Let us reflect on stewardship as we listen to today's offertory.

OFFERTORY *Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming*

James Mansfield

***DOXOLOGY**

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God, above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen!**

***PRAYER OF DEDICATION: (Unison)**

O God, we dedicate these gifts to you and to your mission of peace. Please continue to plant peace in our hearts as we seek to bring peace to the world! We pray in the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN "Comfort, Comfort You My People" (3)**

We Go Into the World

BENEDICTION

CHORAL BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Hark, the Glad Sound!

Edward Broughton

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* So that we can properly greet people who come to the building during Sunday morning worship, Door A will be the only unlocked external door during the worship service.

Life of the Church

PEEK AT THE WEEK:

SUNDAY 12/7:	Second Sunday of Advent Adult Study – 9:00 AM Worship In Person & Online – 10:30 AM COMMUNION Fellowship Luncheon
MONDAY 12/8:	GA – 6:30 PM Al-Anon – 7:00 PM
TUESDAY 12/9:	Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM (FH) Mission – 6:00 PM Stewardship/Finance – 6:30 PM AA – 7:30 PM
WEDNESDAY 12/10:	Trustees – 10:00 AM Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM (FH) “Bring Your Own Bible” Bible Study – 7-8 PM (Zoom) GA – 7:00 PM
THURSDAY 12/11:	Choir – 7:00 PM
SATURDAY 12/13:	Cook for Shelter – 1:00 PM AA – 6:30 PM
SUNDAY 12/14:	Christmas Cantata

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **STEWARDSHIP LUNCHEON AFTER WORSHIP TODAY!** Join us for a delicious rescheduled lunch sponsored by the Ministry of Stewardship and Finance in appreciation of your commitments to the thriving of our congregation!
- **CRAFT SALE AFTER WORSHIP TODAY AND 12/14** The FPCH crafters ran a great booth on November 8th at St. James the Less Catholic Church! They will be selling items in Fellowship Hall on 12/7 and 12/14. Come see what the creative crafters have made and get some early holiday gifts. Proceeds from the sale support our general fund.
- **ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET** This year’s advent devotional booklet, from the Presbyterian Outlook, is titled “Draw Near: Lighting the Advent Path with Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.” This booklet contains a Scripture passage, a reflection, and a prayer for each day of Advent through Christmas Eve. Scattered throughout the booklet is also artwork created by children. To save on printing costs, we are emailing this devotional booklet to everyone on our email list. There are a few printed copies of the booklet in the narthex for those who may prefer a printed copy instead of the email format, and for any guests. This Advent season, may you “Draw Near” to the Christ who has come, and who will come again, and will be forever!

- **THE CHRISTMAS CANTATA WILL BE ON DECEMBER 14TH DURING WORSHIP!** Be sure to join us and be sure to invite others to join us!
- **CONGREGATIONAL MEETING DECEMBER 21ST AFTER WORSHIP** There will be a congregational meeting on December 21st immediately following worship for the purposes of electing officers for 2026 and voting on the pastor's terms of call. Please plan on being present for this!
- **MINISTRY OF MISSION'S FAMILY SPONSORSHIP FOR CHRISTMAS** In Fellowship Hall, grab a post-it note with a gift on it for the family we sponsoring for Christmas through Love, Inc.!
- **CHRISTMAS CAROLING DEC. 21ST** Join us for Christmas Caroling on December 21! We'll be visiting a few of our congregation's homebound members to bring holiday joy and Christmas cookies. The Ministry of Faith Development will provide a light lunch for all carolers following worship and the congregational meeting scheduled for that day. Then we'll head out for caroling, and should be finished by 3 pm. Route maps and directions will be available. If you'd prefer not to drive, carpooling is available. We will not be baking cookies this year, but we'd still like to provide a plate of Christmas cookies to each home we visit. If you'd like to donate a dozen cookies, please let Heather Casiano know. RSVP to Heather Casiano (hcasiano@fpchighland.org) by Dec. 17th if you plan on caroling, donating cookies, or both. Thank you for your participation!
- **CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SCHEDULE** Our *Christmas Eve* candlelight service will be Wednesday, December 24th, at 7:00 PM in person and online. Our *First Sunday of Christmas* worship will be Sunday, December 28th, at 10:30 AM online only.
- **The choir chairs are FINISHED!** They are the culmination of a decades-long held dream of choir members, many of whom have joined the Heavenly Chorus and were part of the desire to have the chairs either replaced or reupholstered. We are joyously accepting donations to the Choir Chair Fund from anyone and everyone who wants to make a contribution in honor of or in memory of a cherished person in their lives who loves/loved music.
- **CHOIR PRACTICE THURSDAYS AT 7:00 PM!** Our choir is a great group, and we would love to keep growing! All voice levels and skill levels are welcome!
- **"BYOB"** (Bring Your Own Bible) discussion group meets on Wednesday evenings from 7-8 pm online using Zoom. Each week this group takes a look at the scriptures from our Sunday worship services, asking questions, bringing up different perspectives, and hopefully encountering the Holy Spirit in a fresh way. The link for the Zoom meetings is emailed out weekly. You can connect to Zoom with a smart phone, tablet or computer. If you're not familiar with how to use Zoom, or to get on our e-mail list, please contact Pastor Tyler or Heather Casiano.
- **"THE BIBLE IN TODAY'S WORLD"** class meets on Sunday mornings from 9-10 am in the middle classroom (across from Pastor Tyler's office). This group is reading through the book, "A is for Alabaster" by Anna Carter Florence. Each week is independent of the other weeks, so come as you are able. If you need a book, or for any other questions, contact Heather Casiano.
- **FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!** If you don't already follow us on Facebook and Instagram, please start doing so @firstpchighland on both Facebook and Instagram.
- **INTERESTED IN BECOMING A MEMBER OF FPCH?** You are always welcome here, whether a member or not! If you are interested in joining as a member, though, we would love to have you! Please talk to Pastor Tyler if you would like to learn more.

Opportunities to serve as the HEART, HANDS, and FEET of Jesus Christ:

- **BLESSING BOX** Please continue to place items in the Blessing Box and take items if you are a person in need! Items most commonly donated: Canned goods with pull tabs, socks, toilet paper, non-perishable foods, small snacks, toiletries, baby wipes and diapers. Please check expiration dates!
- **HELP STOCK OUR PANTRY!** Please pick up a beautifully decorated grocery bag in the narthex and fill it to help the church's food pantry.

Prayer List

Anthony	Victor
Brady Vanes	Marian Clayton
George Griner	Ella P
Guy Hendricks	Melissa J.
Bill and Anettia Holmes	Rita Stroncsek
David Markley	Keren, Zuriel, and Gedeon
Pat and David Kingen	OGB
Diana and Ray Mendoza	Edna Cruz
Janet Orem	Charlie
Cindy Waltz and Sister	Jerry & Rena Martinez
Yvonne Suroviak	Nicole
Georgette Sknerski	Greg
Jakob Holden	Pastor Jane
Denise Matthys	Mary Ellen Edeus
Jan Oprea	Jane and David
Florance Cody	Flora R.
Kathy & Chuck Pumnea	Tyler Gall
Laura Buono Domsic	Phil
The Windstrups	Luana Sulkowski
Rick Parker	Sonny Buono
Gary Everhart	Shannon Sutton
Caroline Studer	Robin
Darlene O'Brien	Mary Hurtt
Doug & Sue Matthews	Eunice
Janet Terpstra	Betsy
Glen Nahler	David
Tom	Trina & Scott
David Hamblin	Joe & Kathy
Jana Tolley	Breanne Polan
Larry & Bonnie Perryman	Tammy
Delta Rose	Alex
Winnie Owen	Ben
Breeanne	Mike Kelly
Mom Bechtler	Sue Heth

Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

² The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

³ His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see
or decide by what his ears hear,

⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor
and decide with equity for the oppressed of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

⁶ The wolf shall live with the lamb;
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed together,
and a little child shall lead them.

⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

⁹ They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Romans 15:4-13

⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸ For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the ancestors ⁹ and that the gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will confess you among the gentiles
and sing praises to your name”;

¹⁰ and again he says,

“Rejoice, O gentiles, with his people”;

¹¹ and again,

“Praise the Lord, all you gentiles,
and let all the peoples praise him”;

¹² and again Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the gentiles;
in him the gentiles shall hope.”

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 3:1-12

³ In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ² “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” ³ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.’ ”

⁴ Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Therefore, bear fruit worthy of repentance, ⁹ and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹ “I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I, and I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Growing into God's Peace

Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

You would be forgiven if you do not usually associate John the Baptist with peace. After all, he is known as an in-your-face rabble rouser, calling people out for their sins and generally raising a ruckus. He wandered the countryside with his wild hair, wild clothing, and wild personality, shouting at the Pharisees and other leaders. He went so far as to have a war of words with Herod and his wife, ultimately leading to his arrest and execution. No, he certainly does not fit our common conception of peace! He does not exude calm. He does not embody quietness. He does not walk away from conflict. Here's the thing, though. Perhaps our common conception of peace is not quite the complete ecosystem of peace, though.

Peace as calm and quiet works for many of us when we talk about inner peace. Many of us long for that type of peace in our souls and spirits, for the roiling torrents that rage within to become gentle breezes and lightly lapping water as happened when Jesus calmed the storm. That is a valid longing and one that we should strive for in our interior spirituality. We should practice centering ourselves in the embrace of the one who calmed the storm. We should pray for reprieve from our anxieties and fears. We should be able to rest easy in our knowledge of God's goodness and our faith in God's promises. And in his own way, John the Baptist was giving us advice on how to find that inner peace—by repenting and making amends for the ways that we have caused harm and thus resolving some of the guilt that inevitably contributes to the storm within.

But John was not just concerned about our interior selves and inner peace. He was also concerned about the broader society, about the harms being perpetrated against his people by those with power. He was concerned about poverty and exploitation and oppression. In short, he was concerned about injustice. And he understood very well, as do many prophets today who have taken up the mantle of John the Baptist, that in the broader society there can be no peace without justice. He also understood that the struggle for justice often requires being a rabble rouser and raising a ruckus. And this is where we often get peace wrong. We confuse and conflate peace with orderliness. And I can say, even as a good Presbyterian, that being decent and in order is by no means the same thing as embodying peace. When it comes to seeking peace in a society marred by poverty, exploitation, and oppression, calm and quiet simply are not going to get the job done. Since justice is required in order for there to be peace, sometimes we have to speak up and shout out. Sometimes we have to stand up and walk out and march. Sometimes we have to name the harms being committed by those with power and call for them to repent and make amends. Sometimes we have to risk our own peace and safety as we seek this more holistic peace—this more *holy* peace, God's peace.

God's peace is that holistic, holy peace which is rooted within our interior selves and branches out to create a global ecosystem. God's peace is that peace which requires justice. For, it would be the solution to and transformation of our current ecosystem of violence—society-wide poverty, exploitation, and oppression as a result of people and groups with power maintaining their power at the expense and harm of those on the margins. And God's peace is precisely the nature of that Kingdom John shouts about in his opening words as he comes out of the wilderness: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!" The Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom that stands in opposition to and as an alternative to the powers and principalities of this world. The Kingdom whose King was the one John was prophesying and preparing the way for. The Kingdom whose King was about to enter the stage in a dramatic way.

You see, John was also in the midst of an Advent season. Last week we talked about how Advent is also a time of waiting and watching and actively preparing the way for Christ to come again with the new Heaven and the new Earth. John was waiting and watching and actively preparing the way for Christ to come into his own, to start his public ministry, to initiate the Kingdom of Heaven. I say "initiate" because the Kingdom of Heaven was not complete with Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. Last week I mentioned that during Advent we can imagine ourselves being carried in God's womb, ready to be birthed along with Jesus on Christmas day. Today let me proclaim that John's Advent was a pregnant pause waiting for the Kingdom of Heaven to be birthed by Jesus. The Kingdom of Heaven is a living, breathing, dynamic, growing body that we are tasked with nurturing and bringing into full realization along with the Holy Spirit. We are called to keep

doing all that we can to make the Kingdom of Heaven real in the here and now of our world. And that means growing into God's peace, the solution to and transformation of systemic violence. For that was the mission of the Prince of Peace, the Prince of God's Peace. Isaiah 'twas foretold it in one of the most famous passages about peace ever spoken or written:

*“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see
or decide by what his ears hear,
but with righteousness he shall judge **for** the poor
and decide with equity **for** the oppressed of the earth.”*

Yes, the Kingdom of Heaven has come near, and the Kingdom of Heaven is centered upon justice for the poor and equity for the oppressed! The Kingdom of Heaven is grown from the seeds of God's peace. And for John, the King of that Kingdom was about to step out of the crowd and plant the first seeds of the Kingdom to be watered in the waters of baptism in the River Jordan.

We know the rest of the story well, but let's review some of the highlights. After he was baptized, he went out into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights, where he was tempted by the cosmic enemy in the midst of his fasting. He then went around the countryside feeding the hungry, healing the broken, empowering the poor and oppressed, preaching against policies that excluded the marginalized, teaching a way of life that demanded the sharing of resources, liberating those imprisoned by societal demons, and embodying the law of Love. He challenged the political leaders and priests who were enacting systemic violence through imperialism, exploitation, and exclusion. He made his way to Jerusalem with the full knowledge that those political leaders and priests wanted to get rid of him precisely because of the Kingdom he had given birth to. After rousing up the rabble as a radical rabbi, he raised a ruckus in the temple. He risked his peace and safety for the sake of God's peace. He was arrested. He was incarcerated. He was executed.

Wow! Like John the Baptist who prepared his way, he certainly did not embody the calm and quiet that we tend to use to define peace. He could and did calm the storm at sea. He can and does calm the storms that rage within us. AND he understood that there could be no true peace without justice. And justice required the total transformation of the powers and principalities of this world into the Kingdom of Heaven. And that transformation required active struggle. Last week we talked about how God's hope is born of active struggle, active faith, and active creativity—in short, it is born of hard labor! I hope it has become abundantly clear today that God's peace is born of the same!

We often use phrases like, “Let there be peace on Earth.” The problem with that is that it is so passive. It calls for peace to happen as if it is some magical thing that can just come. It would be more honest and meaningful for us to say, “Let us make peace on Earth,” or, “Let us build peace on Earth,” or, “Let us *grow* peace on Earth.” For, we have to be active agents of peace in order for God's peace to become a reality. We ourselves have to grow *into* God's peace so that God's peace can grow into that global ecosystem. We have to join in the struggle to disrupt systemic violence. We have to join in the struggle for justice. We have to stand up to the powers and principalities of this world and call out the harm they cause through violence. We have to make a stand for the poor and the exploited and the oppressed. We have to share our resources with those most in need. We have to repent and make amends for our own participation in systemic violence. We have to be willing to rouse a rabble and raise a ruckus. We have to be willing to be a bit like John and a lot like Jesus.

If we Christians all committed to the active work of growing into God's peace, then there actually would start to be peace on Earth! We wouldn't have to worry about ending wars, because the wars would not start in the first place! We wouldn't have to live in fear of shootings because the weapons would not be made in the first place! Let us remember what Isaiah foretold last week:

*"They shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation;
neither shall they learn war any more."*

Loved ones, the Kingdom of Heaven has come near, and it is upon us to nurture it into full realization. It is upon us to transform the weapons of war into tools of peace. It is upon us to then demand an end to the creation of more weapons. It is upon us to prevent wars by bringing an end to the systems of injustice that cause the wars. It is upon us to carry on with the work of the Prince of God's Peace.

And trust me, you will be amazed at the impacts on your own inner peace when you join in the struggle! There is something about actively engaging in the work that we are called to do that calms those storms inside! It quiets the guilt. It quiets the uneasiness about not doing enough. It quiets that dissonance that clamors within when we know we are participating in the oppression of others with our passive acceptance of the status quo. Yes, Jesus certainly has more than one way to calm a storm!

Shall we join our King in the work of the Kingdom of Heaven that has come near? Shall we grow together into God's peace and thus help God's peace to grow? Imagine the possibilities!

*"The wolf shall live with the lamb;
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed together,
and a little child shall lead them.*

*The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

*The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.*

*They will not hurt or destroy
on all the holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.*

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious."

Amen!

On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry

WINCHESTER NEW LM

Charles Coffin, 1736
 Trans. John Chandler, 1837; alt.

Musikalisches Handbuch, 1690
 Harm. William Henry Monk, 1847; alt.

1. On Jor - dan's bank the Bap - tist's cry An -
 2. Then cleansed be ev - ery life from : sin; Make
 3. We hail You as our Sav - ior, Lord, Our
 4. All praise to You, e - ter - nal Son, Whose

noun - ces that the Lord is nigh; A - wake and heark - en,
 straight the way for God with - in, And let us all our
 ref - uge, and our great re - ward; O let Your face up -
 ad - vent has our free - dom won, Whom with the Fa - ther

for he brings Glad tid - ings of the King of kings!
 hearts pre - pare For Christ to come and en - ter there.
 on us shine And fill the world with love di - vine.
 we a - dore, And Ho - ly Spir - it, ev - er - more.

Comfort, Comfort You My People

3

PSALM 42 8.7.8.7.7.8.8

Johannes Olearius, 1671

Trans. Catherine Winkworth, 1863; alt.

Genevan Psalter, 1551

1. Com - fort, com - fort you my peo - ple, Tell of peace, thus says our God;
2. For the her - ald's voice is call - ing In the des - ert far and near,
3. Make you straight what long was crook - ed, Make the rough - er plac - es plain;

Com - fort those who sit in dark - ness Bowed be - neath op - pres - sion's load.
Bid - ding us to make re - pent - ance Since the king - dom now is here.
Let your hearts be true and hum - ble, As be - fits God's ho - ly reign.

Speak you to Je - ru - sa - lem Of the peace that waits for them;
O that warn - ing cry o - bey! Now pre - pare for God a way;
For the glo - ry of the Lord Now o'er earth is shed a - broad;

Tell them that their sins I cov - er, And their war - fare now is o - ver.
Let the val - leys rise in meet - ing And the hills bow down in greet - ing.
And all flesh shall see the to - ken That God's word is nev - er bro - ken.