

Sunday, December 4, 2022 Advent 2 ***“Behold He Comes”***

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

Jesus is Coming! This is the Second Sunday of our waiting and preparation season called Advent. So what have you done to prepare for this season of ‘ings” you know—what was stated last week- the baking, cooking, creating, decorating or even buying gifts, and wrapping them-and there is more- finishing, weeping, paying, driving, and hopefully sitting. These ‘ing’s have become a part of the celebration of this Christmas season, but what we are readying?

Jesus’ coming to earth is not something that happened quickly. Prophets that is people who were faithful to God kept God up to date as to what was really happening on earth through many generations of people. God heard the messages of the people crying out in oppression or even living the good life away from his laws. God listened. His response was to tell these prophets that change would come—in time. Isaiah wrote of the shoot out from the stump of Jesse would arise and God’s Spirit would be upon him. In these words Isaiah prophesied into the future because Jesse a faithful believer of God was imagined as a stump of a tree. When tree stumps occur it is because the tree is cut down, or rotted out or decaying and returning into the earth. But it would be through Jesse’s descendants that there would come forth a branch which would be given strength and the ability to grow. This new shoot would offer hope and this prophecy did offer hope through several generations. This is because Jesse’s descendant would have God’s Spirit upon him and he would be a righteous person with many good qualities. And at some point in the future, there would also be a peaceable kingdom existing. This would occur amongst the animals and people of God’s creation and this has been envisioned by many people through history. When this occurs, the root of Jesse will be the signal to all people and his dwelling will be on earth and full of glory.

So from Isaiah we get prophesy not only of the coming of a messiah, but the coming of the peaceable kingdom- which we know has not yet come to fruition. Yes Jesus did come as the righteous branch of Jesse’s line, but the peaceable kingdom is not yet arrived!

What does this mean for us today? Living over 2000 years after the life and death of Jesus and his ascension into heaven? It means that we are living in the in between times again.

Isaiah prophesied of the Righteous branch to come; Jesus did come and we will continue to focus on his story. But Isaiah also wrote of what will happen when the Messiah comes again.

We need this context of history, future time as well as not so long ago history with Jesus' birth to an unknown time of Christ's coming again and establishing the peaceable kingdom and New Jerusalem. It is in these weeks of advent that we look at the bigger picture and timeline and be amazed at Isaiah's prophesy still not being fulfilled!

Matthew the gospel writer did the same kind of thing. We will read part of the first 2 chapters later on in Advent, but today we focus John the Baptist who was chosen by God for the special task of teaching, preaching and baptizing people to believe in the messiah. It is John the Baptist who humbles himself before God and goes out in the desert, survives on bugs and honey (living off the grid) and preaches the message of Isaiah to get ready for the messiah will come. And when he comes everyone needs to get going! Yes another 'ing' going in the sense of figuring out for oneself what is key to doing the work of God.

To figure out how, Paul's instructions to the Romans offers us guidance today – welcome one another and praise His holy name. For the one who rise to rule the Gentiles in him they have hope. This seems easy enough but do we do this? OR do we keep the message to ourselves. Do we hear or read God's word and say—this is good, or that's interesting. Do we share it with others? Yet if it was the latest news story or hockey score would we share that instead?

How might we experience peace as we anticipate Christ's birth? Is our hope tied with peace? Does what we hope for enable us to have peace? Or do we have peace because of our hope in what is not seen or experienced?

A few weeks ago we explored the idea of peace—because of Remembrance Day being observed. But that is the kind of peace that is often referred to as outward peace. What Jesus brings as he comes to us is the peace he offers that comes from Him and is received by others. WE say "May the peace of Christ be with you." But do we understand this peace of Christ? We might define it as the feeling of peace that comes from tasting Christ as your highest joy and trusting that He will do everything necessary to bring you even more of His joy.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. – Colossians 3:15 Paul writes these words to help the church at Colossae as they were unsure of what was happening around them as they established Christ's church.

The world is a scary, unpredictable place. Christian or not, we are all affected by fear and uncertainty in our lives in different ways. But if you think fear, worry, and anxiety are merely the products of our time, we know that through history the desire for peace was constant. People have been seeking calm in the midst of chaos throughout human history. And this peace from God is much different than that of the world. Jesus states: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. – John 14:27*

What makes Christ or God's peace different is how peace moves in you. Often, peace is circumstantial in the world, that is when circumstances align, when you agree or come to an agreement then and only then can peace be had. Peace is often negotiated for the purpose of bringing an end to the conflict. Because of this, to have peace in the world everything must line up. This is not how God's peace works. The peace of God does not come because there is agreement. Many times the circumstances are so at odds with each other that it would make peace seem impossible because there is too much chaos. This is what makes God's peace different-it exists in the midst of chaos and that is by design. Even though circumstances cause us to wonder, Christ's peace *is still stronger*. When you can walk through the storm not fearful of it overtaking you, then you are experiencing what it means to have the peace of God.

God's peace is also *defensive* in nature as it stands watch over your heart and mind and stops those anxieties, worries or fears from taking control. This enables you to remain calm and focused in the midst of what is occurring. *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:7*

Experiencing Christ's peace is truly a gift- it never leaves if you believe in God and the One who comes as the Prince of Peace, Jesus. *Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. – 2 Thessalonians 3:16*

The peace of God should dwell with you all the time. One of the fruits of the spirit we receive as faithful followers is peace. Since the Spirit lives in us, then this peace dwells in us as well. This peace which we receive through faith stays with us and is with us so that we may seek it from within when we are dealing with the issues of life. This is Christ's peace—and why we want to share it with others! This is the message that Isaiah prophesied about—the righteous one will come as Messiah. This is the One God told Mary that she would give birth to as a baby. This is Jesus, the Son of the Most High who will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And this is the Messiah, the one John the Baptist was trying to tell others was in their midst and they needed to repent and believe.

As we continue into Advent we need to prepare for the Prince of Peace to enter our hearts once again. We might see Jesus as a baby helpless and dependent, or we might envision him supporting us or we might even want to shout to others—this is the One We've been waiting for—what are you waiting for? Believe in Him. HE comes for all of us. Just repent, believe and live always. Behold He comes!

PRAYER

God of peace we pray for your peace to enter our hearts and renew our faith. Show us your way to prepare for Jesus by opening our minds to understand your teaching. Dwell in us as we seek to live in Christ's peace this day and always. Amen.