

Sunday, December 3, 2023 ***“Where do you seek peace?”***

Isaiah 40:1-11 Mark 1:1-11 Luke 1:41-56

Where do you seek peace? Commercials for bath products call us to have ‘tranquil moments’ to be ‘taken away’, to relax to the smells and scents of nature now in small bottles and infused into the air. All these are considered ways to obtain peace for a few minutes. But what are we really looking for? What does it mean to have peace? We have lit the second candle on the Advent wreath which focuses on peace. The first candle represented hope and as we add a little more light we are able to see a bit more and with it, we are able to focus on peace. But where might we find the kind of peace that lasts? As we continue in our Advent journey to Christmas with our focus being “The Thrill of Hope” we must understand that having hope enables us to experience peace.

Peace is defined in many ways: ‘harmony’, ‘order’, ‘justice’, or as a means for ‘conflict management’. These definitions are accepted but to understand peace depends to a large extent on what is being sought. What kind of peace are you seeking? Is what you seek a personal, every day, kind of peace? And how might we build this or know it?

There is a story about a man who owned a large and expensive clock crafted in Switzerland. He kept the clock in a window, where it was seen by passersby who routinely set their watches by it. However, at one point, something was wrong with the clock. Its hands habitually showed the wrong time. So the man spent considerable energy every day in turning the clock’s hands to the right positions so that the people who looked for the clock to help them in their daily routine would be on time. This went on for several years, which kept the owner weary. One day one of the people knocked on the door of the man’s house as he was moving the clock’s hands yet again. He asked him what was happening. The owner of the clock stated that he was just adjusting the time again. The visitor simply suggested, “Instead of wasting your energy in correcting the hands, why don’t you fix the clock’s inner parts?” “What a tremendous idea!” the owner exclaimed in astonishment and delight. “I never thought of that!”

As we continue to make our way through Advent we often need to stop for a moment, to assess what time it is for ourselves and then, decide what is best to do. Our readings for today seem to be haphazard in their essence but what collects them as one is simply this—Peace. That is the peace which leads to our knowledge and love of Christ Jesus who redeems us.

The prophet Isaiah, speaks about the need to prepare the way of the Lord, to make straight in the desert a highway for God. In order to do this change will be coming, every

mountain will be made low and bumpy roads will be levelled, and when this occurs the glory of God will be revealed and all people will be together. God's word will stand forever and this is where we may have peace. God upheld his promise and it is up to us to prepare for the coming of Christ both in this season of Advent as we ready ourselves to hear the story of Jesus again and as we anticipate Christ's return some day. Isaiah is sharing his prophecy of what is to come- the birth of a Saviour, and Christ who will reign forever.

We learn about this in different ways in Mark and Luke. Mark's version is succinct and clear—John the Baptist and Jesus are fully grown men and setting out in the task God called them to do. Mark's Gospel does not tell of the birth of Jesus, but has John the Baptist doing his job- preparing the people at the Jordan River and preaching for the need for forgiveness of sins. John the Baptist is stirring up the crowd and then he sees Jesus calls out to him and tells all present who he is- Son of God, Lamb of God, king of Kings, Lord of lords. John does this because his message is clear- to truly understand Jesus you need to repent- to open your heart and seek forgiveness, when this occurs, you will know Jesus and know what Christmas means in new ways. John states it best—believe repent be forgiven—this is Jesus the Son of God sent to redeem you, save you! He is the Lamb of God- the Messiah!

And in Luke's Gospel it is through Mary's Song of praise—Magnificat—that she sings of God for God has done great things by lifting her up to become the mother of Jesus. She is blessed but what her song tells us is that “from age to age, to all who fear, such mercy love imparts dispensing justice far and near, dismissing selfish hearts.” This means God will be faithful to his promises just as God has always been. There is nothing to fear, but many reasons to rejoice- You are not alone.. Just like Mary was not alone facing the pregnancy of Jesus when she was so young and unmarried. But God lifted her up to be the one who brought Emmanuel into this world- a baby who would live a human life.

So where are we searching for peace? Currently it is not on earth. Jesus Christ provides us with an inner peace that surpasses the peace the world offers. If we look to Him with faith, we can feel peace in any circumstance. The Savior taught, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives but as I give. (John 14:27)

In sending Jesus to earth, God did not intend to make only a few cosmetic changes. God intended nothing less than to change the whole dynamic of human character. That's why each Advent we encounter this strange character John the Baptist with his call to repentance. It is to remind us that Christmas is not simply about candy canes, reindeer, snowflakes and colored

lights. It is about a righteous God who loves humanity so much that He sent His Son to redeem us from our sins. This is the heart of Advent and where we might find peace. Because of Jesus, we have nothing to fear—because Jesus conquered death by rising to new life. Yet God controls all things- if we believe we will have peace within.

The thrill of hope brings peace yes in the Baby in the manger but also the Christ who said, remember me. Today as we share in the sacrament of Holy Communion let us remember Jesus who lives as our Risen Saviour and God who gives to us peace beyond our full understanding. We have been given peace through Jesus. Let us be reminded of this as we pray together:

God of hope and peace, we praise you for these gifts to us as we worship you this advent season. Bless us O God as we grow closer to you in faith and help us to have hope in our hearts that will last eternally. We ask in the name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.