

AM Sunday, December 24, 2017

John 1:1-4

Luke 1:26-35 2:1-7

Christ's Peaceable Kingdom

May the peace of Jesus the Christ be with you. AND ALSO WITH YOU.

Each week when we gather together we give hugs and handshakes as we express to each other this statement advocating and offering as a prayer to each other that we will experience Christ's peace. But what is this peace which we yearn to share, experience and need not only as we wind down Advent preparations and prepare for traditions to begin on this Christmas Eve. What is the peace of Christ we offer to each other and hope for as we greet each other?

Throughout this Advent journey we have been reflection upon the words of the prophet Isaiah to help us to understand why the people at that time yearned for a Messiah and why God planned to send His Son to earth. To Isaiah, the people of that time were living a life of uncertainty and lack of focus. They were walking in darkness and seemed to be living in the land of the shadow of death. No hope, no light, no future but only living and preparing for death. For them all hope was gone.

Isaiah focused on peace for God's world and so our prayer should be that the earth created by God in the beginning will experience his peaceable kingdom as well. Just think about how poorly humans have managed the earth through history- and how today it is still on ongoing teachable moment which we share with one generation to another as we each strive to live with respect in creation.

But what does this mean on this 4th Sunday of Advent when what we are wanting to hear is the story of Jesus' birth so that we can experience that amazing feeling of God's grace when we realize that those we are with are the ones God prepared for us to be together. This is so that we can share and experience Christ's peace again? What does this mean for us in light of the world's need to be looked after and cared for as God first intended? What does caring for God's creation have to do with Jesus' birth?

Mary and Joseph have been travelling a long distance from home and although she is young she is very pregnant as she rides upon a donkey as Joseph walk on the rock trails headed for Bethlehem. It has been a struggle for Mary these last months- with many surprises. An angel tells her that God chose her to carry His Son who would be born like humans and she would be his mother. She is not yet married to Joseph and so she is surprised that the Spirit of God would make this happen to her. And then of course she needs to tell Joseph about what

their life together would be involving- raising the Son of God. Not what either of them had planned when the betrothal was agreed to months before. And now as his promised wife, pregnant and uncomfortable, they both have to be registered and taxed for the governing leader Caesar and to do this they have to go to Bethlehem.

One can only imagine the questions she had in mind—but what did Mary really do? She pondered them in her heart and fully trusted God. God knew what he was doing, right? Mary was God's humble servant and she was living her life in terms of what God wanted her to be and do. And she did not question this. She was worried- where could she rest, eat and prepare herself as a mom-to-be. Where would they sleep at night and how much further was it? When could she find peace in the midst of this major change in her life? She turned to God and trusted him.

We like to look at images of the Nativity scene--- Mary, Joseph, and the baby together. There is something amazing about these human beings who took upon themselves to bring into the world God's Son, Jesus without hesitation but fully trust the words of angels that this baby is God's Son and his name is Jesus. Each portrayal of the nativity has something different though because of the expressions on the faces of all. They are filled with wonder, contentment, tiredness, fear and still others are show parents who are delighted, filled with excitement and wonder what is to happen next. What do you see/ or think was on the minds and hearts of Mary and Joseph after Jesus was born? Was there peace?

At the moment of Jesus' birth there would have been relief as he inhaled air for the first time and let it out with a hearty cry. He would have been washed and cleaned up by a servant girl or midwife known by the innkeeper. And then staring at this baby, Mary and Joseph would they have realized the importance this baby would have on human history or the future relationship of God and his creation? Probably not but they would have shared precious moments at Jesus' birth.

Christ's peaceable kingdom is difficult to describe in these moments soon after his birth. Only a few would have known about a young woman who had given birth in a stable. But God took care of the message that needed to go out—angels in the outfields with shepherds and a bright beacon star overhead shining for all to see. But especially for those who watched the skies for changes

Christ's peaceable kingdom however begins to spread and to grow. The shepherds hear the message of the angels and are in awe at seeing the baby and his parents. They then begin to tell others what they witnessed and the message spreads. The messiah is born! The messiah is born! The one whom God promised is here to help us! He is born!

This message of the Messiah is still being shared today. Amidst the lights, decorations, shopping and everything Santa and reindeer, the message is still being shared. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born for you. He is the Messiah, the Lord!

A small infant was born and placed in a feed bed to sleep. He was swaddled that is wrapped up in a blanket like a hotdog in a bun and placed in the manger to rest. And it is here that Mary and Joseph watch him and experience peace from God and peace knowing that this baby will make a difference for the world's people at that time then and for always, long as this message of hope is shared: Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men/ all on whom his favour rests.

God's favour rested on Mary and Joseph and they welcomed Jesus as their son and raised him in the teachings and traditions of their faith. If we express our concerns, questions and confess them to God we too will received God's favour. God will grant to us his grace and love through this we will not fear what this life on earth entails nor will we be afraid of what is to come after our dying, God will forgive us and when we are forgiven, we will experience Christ's peace. We will be a part of Christ's peaceable kingdom and like the shepherds who saw the baby and ran out to tell others; we too will want to do the same. But we must be willing to share our story as we tell of God's love for us given to us in Jesus- the prince of Peace, the Saviour and our messiah, our Christ.

Christmas is a wonderful time of year where we come together from different backgrounds and experience love as God intended. Love that is expressed in various ways- through hugs and handshakes, through the exchange of gifts or by phone calls and by praying for and with one another. Praying to God the Father as we welcome His Son Jesus into our world once again is love. And is one way that we share as we experience Christ's peaceable kingdom here on earth. But it is also up to us to be responsible and share Christ's love as easily as we greet each other in His peace.

Jesus came into the world so that it could be saved from sin. From the manger to the cross His purpose was laid out for him and he established His kingdom here amongst those who believed and followed him. Let us rejoice in this as we seek again to know and be a part of Christ's peaceable kingdom. Amen.

SILENCE

Peace—peace, God's peace—let us rejoice for we have peace within because of Jesus. Let us be glad because we have received Christ's peace as his presence is made known through all of us. Let us rejoice and know that we are God's faithful people seeking Christ's peaceable kingdom yet also knowing that it is present in our hearts and in the hearts of our brothers and sisters in faith. Thanks be to God. Amen.