

Sunday, December 9, 2018

Malachi 3:1-4

Luke 1:68-78

Voices Speak of God's Gift of Peace

Turn on your radio, tv, or livestream and talk show and what do you hear? Voices with opinions about everything and anything. From the best way to decorate your fireplace to the best way to make sugar cookies. And then there are the voices of those singing songs and carols which are serious or fun and then dissenting voices about the story in the song. People like to share opinions, ideas and their point of view about everything yet, what are these voices actually saying?

One voice tells us of the plight of people everywhere in search of and in need of the basics of life. Another voice talks about the extravagance of the leadership of the nation at the expense of the people. Another voice talks about the Earth and its changes and how the climate is changing everything and everyone. And then there is a haunting melody of the voice of the people in distress, people crying in the wilderness. And then the words of the prophet Isaiah are read again. "Prepare the way of the Lord."

Isaiah stated, "Prepare for God's arrival! Make the road smooth and straight. Every ditch is to be filled in. Every bump smoothed out. Fix up the roads for there are no detours allowed. Pave over the ruts.. Everyone needs to come and see—God's salvation in our midst. What did Isaiah actually mean? Isaiah's words were filled with tasks of preparation for God's salvation to come. The way had to be fixed up- no road blocks, detours, or even bumps or ruts; all needed to be fixed up and smoothed.

Malachi writing a few generations after Isaiah tells of God's instructions to the people. I'm sending my messenger on ahead to clear the way for him. Out of the blue, the One you've been waiting for will come. And what are we to do according to this prophet? Clean ourselves and our possessions up; scrub and soak, the gold and silver until they are fit to present offerings of righteousness to God. Then all will be fit and pleasing to God.

So not only are the roads to be fixed up, so are we- to be cleansed and refined. Because the One who will come will be like white-hot fire from the smelter's furnace. He'll be like the strongest lye soap at the laundry.—pure and clean!

And then even more generations later, a contemporary relative of the Promised one, Zechariah's whose ability to speak was sustained while Elizabeth was pregnant. Speaks again upon name

his son. It is Zechariah's son, John, who having grown up has received a message from God. It is John who is dressed in rags and humility, travels around the area of the Jordan River and tells the people using Isaiah's words, "Prepare the way of the Lord."

People hear him and want to learn more about the promised one but are unsure. John teaches them the need to confess all the ways of their sins and to prepare for a new and better day. He tells them that they were to be baptised which would lead to the forgiveness of sins. But he also spoke that this water of baptism will not deflect God's judgment, but their whole life needed to change. And their lives need to be green and blossoming before God.

On this second Sunday of Advent we hear these voices calling to us to come, repent and receive forgiveness and in doing this, we have opportunity to rejoice and see for ourselves the joy and wonder of life eternal, made possible by God. We also hear these voices calling to us to come so that we may receive Christ's peace from within. But we must be ready and willing to come.

What are the voices you are hearing today? The voices we hear are mixed= there is a concern over what is politically correct, what is snubbing another person, and even what does it all mean when we really need to gather all people together and pray for peace. IN this Advent season, we take this time to prepare for Jesus' birth by listening to the voices of the past- the prophets of many years ago who realized and knew that God had planned something big and important for when he would enter into human history. But people through the ages have not realized the depth of this gift born in a stable. God spoke to people in history about his plan to send Emmanuel- God with us. God continues to speak to us as well.

What do you need to do to prepare for Christmas? In years gone by, it took much time to get the flatware ready- silver polish was used to clean off the tarnish; the tea service was brought out of storage and made ready with special cleanings. Linens were washed, ironed and starched. Bleaching was carried out in the dining room, kitchen and bathrooms in order to eliminate germs and keep all surfaces clean. But these tasks have gone by the wayside with the use of paper plates and utensils, cleansers we spray and wipe so that the preparation is often minimal and the sharing time is even less so. Yet the gathering still takes place.

John the Baptist, Isaiah and Malachi words are still being shared as the voices from the past. The story that must still be told is about the baby that comes for this infant is the Son of God. You might be thinking but I am struggling within my heart and mind as you are grieving losses, physical challenges or

even emotional changes. It would be so easy to do nothing. And if this is how you are feeling /thinking, then it is time to stop and evaluate what you are doing as you continue in this Advent season. Do this re-evaluation and for whatever reason- loss of job, death of a loved one in recent times, or even if you are feeling tired, remember to clear the path, to clear your mind and heart and to open your heart to receive Jesus. Sit, relax and experience the Spirit moving you to something different. This is the peace that you yearn for and so does the world.

The glory of God has been revealed to many generations who have gone before us after they have died and been received into their heavenly home. But we who are here may experience glimpses of this through the world's abilities to show and share peace. One such event was in December 1914 amidst the battleground of WWI, "On a frosty, starlit night, a miracle took place. In 1914, a melody drifted over the darkness of No Man's Land. First "O, Holy Night," then "God Save the King."

Peeking over their trenches for what must have been the first time in weeks, British soldiers were surprised to see Christmas trees lit with candles on the parapets of the enemy's trenches.

Then a shout: "You no shoot, we no shoot!"

The Christmas Truce was a brief, spontaneous cease-fire that spread up and down the Western Front in the first year of World War I. It's also a symbol of the peace on Earth and goodwill toward humans so often lacking not just on the battlefield but in our everyday lives."

And it is in this spirit that we must seek Christ's peace. We must listen to the voices of God's people so that we can understand and know for ourselves what is possible. For to know Jesus is to know Peace, but without him, we have nothing. The world needs to listen to the voices of the past, to listen to the Old story of Jesus' birth which is to come and to pray for the possibilities of knowing Jesus within our hearts and minds.

In 1969 the Beatles recorded a song entitled, "Give Peace a Chance," with the refrain, "all we are saying is give peace a chance. "Peace is a sure thing if the Prince of Peace reigns in our hearts." And for each one of us we should pray each day, "Lord make me an instrument of your peace." For when we know Jesus we know peace.

PRAYER God of peace we pray as love abounds and our hearts are filled with the sounds of joy as the earth waits for Christ's birth. Help us and enable us to seek your peace and know you, really know you through faith and with hope. Amen.