

Rev. Janet R. Doyle
Second Sunday in Advent
Candle of PEACE
Sunday, December 5, 2021
Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-5; Matthew 1:18-25

Sermon: It's The Most Wonderful Time of the Year—Gift of Peace

What do you fear? We all know something about fear. When you experience anxiety or fear your body reacts; you feel the adrenaline release as your heart races, your breathing accelerates, your stomach churns, and your muscles tense. It is a stress response that we call fight or flight. When we are afraid, we aren't at peace. The feeling of being afraid takes control of us and peace is the last thing on our mind.

Many of the people we read about during this time of the year in our scriptures were afraid and were dealing with this fight or flight response. Joseph was afraid when he found out Mary was going to have a baby named Jesus and they weren't married yet. An angel came to him and told him to not be afraid and so Joseph took Mary as his wife. He had peace.

Mary was afraid when she was told she was going to have a baby and it was going to be the Savior of the world. The angel told her not to be afraid and she then had peace.

The shepherds were afraid when the angels came to them and told them to go to Bethlehem. The angels told them not to fear. To move beyond their fear, they all needed to trust and move toward the feeling of Peace. It is difficult to have peace.

We live in a troubled world and when we look at the news, it can cause us to fear. It can cause us to want to stay in our homes and not go out into the world. There is so much hatred, violence, darkness in our world and illness from Covid-19. That is exactly why we needed Jesus, our Savior, Immanuel, God with us, to come into the world to save us. Jesus came to give us HOPE. Jesus came to give us internal PEACE that the world does not give us and eternal PEACE to be with Jesus forever. Knowing where you are going when you die can give you peace.

This season when we say, “Peace and Goodwill to all,” it is difficult, because, unless you know the Prince of Peace and Jesus is your Savior, you will not have peace.

John 14:27 Jesus said, “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 let them be afraid.”

Isaiah 40 that we read today in our scripture lesson is good news for fearful, troubled people. The first half of the book is filled with terrifying judgments while the closing chapters reflect the mercy and grace of God.

Isaiah ministered and delivered these prophecies nearly 150 years before God’s judgment would be delivered to Judah through their defeat and deportation to Babylon. Most of the chapters in Isaiah before Chapter 40 predict the downfall of nations, including God’s own people. One hundred and fifty years later, as the Jews were dejected in their seventy-year exile, these words of the prophet would have brought real hope and comfort to them. They had been severely disciplined by God for their idolatry. The opening words to this scripture would have a peaceful, calming affect on the people.

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended.” Isaiah is taking a prophetic look 100 years into the future when the people will be put into exile.

These words bring peace and comfort and express the deep affection God has for his people. “Comfort” is a word that we all like and it brings to mind a feeling of peace. It’s a word that takes different shapes for each of us. Where do you find comfort and peace of mind? Do you find peace sitting in worship on Sunday? Do you find comfort taking a walk? Playing with your children or grandchildren? Are you at peace sitting with family watching a movie at home? Maybe you find comfort baking or making something. Are you at peace reading the Bible or a book?

So, Isaiah speaks to the people telling them the Lord speaks tenderly to the people, saying “Be comforted. Be at peace. The warfare is over. The exile is over. What good news!”

Do you hear God’s voice speaking tenderly to you? God wants you to be at peace with yourself, asking for forgiveness and being forgiven, making peace with God, and God wants you to have peace with your family and neighbors because Isaiah 40 is not just for the exiles in Babylon for 70 years, but it is meant to be understood as a promise yet to come.

In the years following Jesus’ birth, John the Baptist is the one who is preparing the way of the Lord. He is preparing the way, for the King is coming. This is all good news that should bring our hearts peace. We are not alone so we don’t have to fear.

God wants to be involved in every situation of our life, including how we celebrate him at Christmas. Jesus is our source of peace. So, we need to talk with Him, pray with Him and read His Word. Isaiah 26:3 promises he “will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.” We can enjoy the peace Jesus brings us as children of the King.

You can experience God’s peace in your life regardless of all that is happening in the world around you. There may be turmoil at work or conflict in your home or problems in our country, yet you can experience peace, God’s peace, peace that the Apostle Paul describes as “peace which passes understanding.” When you walk in God’s presence, and live in God’s presence, you begin to experience the comfort and peace of God no matter what happens.

1 Thessalonians 5:13 says, “Live in peace with each other.” And Romans 12:18 says, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” God wants his people to live together in peace. He wants us to get along. We cannot experience his peace within our hearts as long as we’re intent on stirring up conflict with others.

The Grinch, in the book *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, was not at peace with himself or the Whos down in Who-ville. “He hated Christmas! The whole Christmas season!” He tried to stop Christmas from coming. He created conflict with the Whos by taking everything away that was a part of Christmas. He wanted the Whos to fear him and be sad and angry, but the

Whos didn't get angry with the Grinch. They didn't even get sad. Even without all the packages, wrapping, bows, and decorations Christmas came because the Whos were at peace even without all the Christmas presents and decorations; they still had each other.

The Grinch's heart which was two sizes too small grew three sizes that day when he heard the Whos singing and being happy and joyful in the midst of their circumstances. The Grinch was welcomed into Who-ville and loved by the Whos. He was finally at peace with himself and made peace with the Whos. Those whom the Grinch feared, now were his friends and he was at peace. He even carved the roast beast. What a complete change of heart!

When we find peace within ourselves, when we find peace with God, we will begin to find peace with one another to have a life full of joyful tranquility.

Peace with God is foundational to all other peace. Peace with God is through Jesus—Immanuel, God with us. The baby born in a humble manger came to give us HOPE and PEACE. Romans 5:1 says to us, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, by believing, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Having been justified by faith and trusting in God and all his promises—it is then we can have peace in the midst of the storms.

Luke 2: 14 says, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all on whom his favor rests.”

Come to the Lord's Table today and find rest and peace for your soul. It is a table where all are welcomed to find Hope and eternal Peace that the world cannot give. In a world that is full of unrest and hatred, let us be at peace with God and let us be the peacemakers for we will be called the children of God.