

## 2006 Advent Sermon Series: Peace on Earth

### *“Personal Peace”*

**Jeremiah 33:14-16 Luke 21:25-36**

**Preached by Richard Bolin on at Culver-Palms UMC on December 3, 2006**

It is just the beginning of Advent, our 4 weeks of preparation for the fulfillment that is Christmas, but I want to jump right to a passage of scripture we will read on Christmas Eve. If Advent is the season of preparation, then it is good to look ahead so that we can have our eyes on where we are going.

On the night of Jesus' birth, the angels proclaimed the good news to shepherds on the hillside. “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!’ Luke 2:13-14

This brief statement tells us what the coming of Jesus means: Glory to God in heaven and peace to people on earth. The birth of Jesus glorifies God because it is a revelation of God's nature. It is God's act of unconditional love to redeem creation, and thus the angels sing glory to God because of what God has done, and all of creation is invited to join the angels' song.

And then the angels tell what this means for humanity. The birth of Jesus brings peace on earth “among those whom God favors.” This is an inclusive statement, not an exclusive one. The birth of Jesus, the incarnation, God coming to be with us and redeem us through love – this is God acting with favor toward all God's children. All are included in God's favor, and all are recipients of this peace.

How many Christmas cards have you gotten over the years that included the phrase “Peace on Earth”? These words as much as any others we associate with Christmas. Yet it also seems that the words mock us. In what sense did peace come 2000 years ago? In what sense does it come upon us again this Christmas? What kind of peace can we expect in the future?

Let's talk about peace this Advent season. This is a comprehensive peace. It is peace experienced in the human heart. It is peace that shows us the way of non-violence. It is the peace that comes with justice. It is peace that reconciles all creation with itself and with God.

On these four Sundays in Advent we will examine four aspects of the comprehensive peace about which the angels did sing. The scope of this peace is described in the assigned scriptures that are preparing us for Christmas.

Today we will speak of “Personal Peace.”

*“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly,”*  
[Luke 21:34]

Next Sunday we will learn of “The Way of Peace.”

*“Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight. [Luke 3:4]*

On December 17 John the Baptist describes “A Just Peace.”

*“And the crowds asked him, ‘What then should we do?’*

*In reply he said to them, ‘Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.’”* [Luke 3:10-11]

And on the morning of December 24 we will celebrate God’s “Universal Peace.”

*“And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.”* [Micah 5:4-5]

This comprehensive peace that Jesus brings begins with a Personal Peace.

A woman was doing her last-minute Christmas shopping at a crowded mall. She was tired of fighting the crowds. She was tired of standing in lines. She was tired of fighting her way down long aisles looking for a gift that had sold out days before.

Her arms were full of bulky packages when the elevator door opened. It was full. The occupants of the elevator grudgingly tightened ranks to allow a small space for her and her load.

As the doors closed she blurted out, “Whoever is responsible for this whole Christmas thing ought to be arrested, strung up, and shot!” A few nodded and grunted like they knew what she was talking about.

Then, from somewhere in the back of the elevator came a single voice that said, “Don’t worry. They already crucified him.”

Indeed, Jesus is the reason for the season.

But if by “This Christmas Thing” is meant the shopping mall experience and the over-scheduled month of December, then Jesus would say, “I am not responsible for all of that.”

If by “this Christmas Thing” is meant the stress of too many parties, overly gaudy decorations, a materialistic shopping frenzy, then what Jesus is responsible for is the opposite of all of that. Jesus is the bringer of the Gospel of peace, beginning with the inner, grounded peace, which enables people to walk with a centered calmness amidst the noise of a worried world.

*“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life ... ”* [Luke 21:34]

The Christmas season can sometimes be harried and stressful, but much more so were the days of which Jesus spoke to his disciples, days of persecution and chaos. His life showed them and us how to live through such days, that we not become “weighed down” by the worries of this life.

**Jesus taught us about inner peace.** Stay focused on what really matters. “Seek first the kingdom of God.”

**Jesus modeled for us inner peace.** He drew strength from times alone in the wilderness. He did not allow the world to set his agenda.

**But most importantly, Jesus is himself the reason for our peace.**

Jesus is the message of God’s favor toward us. This is the lyric of the angels’ song. The creator of all things, the one who is glorified in the heavens, is with us in this child. That is how important you are. That is how favored you are. That is how loved we are. To know such love is to know peace. To know such forgiveness is to know peace. To have such hope is to have peace. If God is for us, who can prevail against us? Being anchored in God keeps us centered in the midst of the world’s storms. Our anchor is Jesus.

Speaking to his disciples about days of persecution and chaos, Jesus said: "Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

"Now when these things begin to take place," he said. What things? Not optimistic things; not the latest FBI statistics that show the crime rate dropping; not the signs of positive economic indicators. When times are good and life is easy, hope is cheap. But Jesus said to raise your heads and know that your redemption is drawing near "when the times of foreboding are upon you." Jesus says to his followers, when many faint in fear, that is when you need to have hope! When times of disaster and violence cause many to lose themselves in worry, that is when we need to be grounded in our faith, to be centered with assurance of inner peace, because nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Peace happens from the inside out. Peace does not come to us when the world ceases to be at war. Rather, when we are at peace in ourselves, then the world will follow suit.

It is like the story of the village that had had no rain for a long time. All the prayers and processions had been in vain; the skies remained shut tight. In the hour of its greatest need, the village turned to the Great Rainmaker. He came and asked for a hut on the edge of the village and for a five-day supply of bread and water. Then he sent the people off to their daily work. On the fourth day it rained. The people came in jubilation from their fields and workplaces and gathered in front of the rainmaker's hut to congratulate him and ask about the mystery of the rainmaking. He answered them: "I can't make it rain." "But it is raining," the people said. The rainmaker explained: "When I came to your village, I saw the inner and outer disorder. I went into the hut and got myself in order. When I was in order, you, too, got in order; and when you were in order, nature got in order, and when nature got in order, it rained." [*The Search for the Meaning of Life: Essays and Reflections on the Mystical Experience* by Willigis Jager]

When we are at peace with ourselves, assured and forgiven as God's beloved children, then we will be at peace with our neighbors. When we are at peace there will be peace among nations. When there is peace among nations, then the earth will experience healing. When the earth is healed, the heavens will rejoice. Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among all, for we are the recipients of God's favor. Amen. Let it be so.