

## 2006 Advent Sermon Series: Peace on Earth

### *“The Way of Peace”*

Malachi 3:1-4 Luke 3:1-6

**Preached by Richard Bolin at Culver-Palms UMC on December 10, 2006**

“Peace on earth” is the promise of the angels’ song on the night of Jesus birth. And so we are not shy to talk about peace on earth this Advent Season in the 2006<sup>th</sup> year after our savior’s birth.

This peace that we are promised at Christmas time is an all-encompassing 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 are examining 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.

Last week we examined “Personal Peace.”

Today we consider “The Way of Peace.”

Next Sunday we hear John the Baptist describe “A Just Peace.”

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

The Personal Peace of which we spoke last week is the peace that passes understanding, the inner peace that none can take away from us.

**Jesus taught us about inner peace**, telling us to focus on what really matters. “Seek first the kingdom of God.”

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

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

Jesus is the embodiment of God’s favor, which the angels’ song tells us is shining upon humanity. The creator of all things is with us in this child. That is how favored we 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. This is our personal peace. And that, in brief, was last week’s sermon.

But the peace of which the angel’s sing is not only a personal peace. It is more than a calm serenity capable of ignoring the craziness of the world. It is also the promise of a transformed world. Peace on earth is the fulfillment of the prayer Jesus taught us, that God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The prophets have given us the vision of a just peace, a universal peace, when swords will be beat into plowshares and nations shall not learn war anymore.

The path that connects our Personal Peace with God’s Just and Universal Peace is the Way of Peace.

Prepare the Way of the Lord. This way is the means that will take us to the end. And the means are just as important as the ends. Going the Way of Peace is the only way to arrive at the destination of peace.

Just as Jesus taught and modeled “inner peace,” so Jesus also taught and modeled the lifestyle that is the Way of Peace.

This lifestyle is most definitely not a serene stroll through a chaotic world. Jesus’ way is not for the faint of heart. The way of peace challenges injustice, stands for truth, and loves when it is costly to do so. The way of peace is the way of the cross. It is the way of non-violence, but it is not the way of the coward.

Biblical scholar Walter Wink has written an insightful study on the teachings of Jesus and non-violence. Jesus said, “if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.” (Matthew 5:39) This is not an act of submission. It is courageous defiance. The blow Jesus describes here is a backhanded insult. A master does not strike a slave with his left hand. And a master does not strike a slave with his fist, for to do so would be to stand on equal footing. The master uses the back of his right hand to strike the right cheek of his slave. To turn the other cheek is to stand and say, “I will not be submissive.”

When faced with violence we commonly think we have two choices, fight back or run away. But the way of Jesus is a third way.

Jesus said, “if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well,” (Matthew 5:40), or as it is stated in Luke, “from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.” (Luke 6:29) The English here is a little more polite than the Greek, the sense of which is the peasant responding to the unjust appropriation of his outer garment by handing over his inner garment as well and standing naked in the courtroom, another act of defiance intended to shine light on the injustice that has been done.

The third example of this third way to respond to oppression comes in the next verse of Jesus’ sermon on the mount. “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.” According to Roman law, a soldier could force a civilian to carry his pack one mile, and one mile only. So what happens when the Jew carrying the soldier’s 85-pound pack comes to the mile marker placed on the Roman highway and just keeps walking? What goes through the soldier’s mind? The initiative has changed sides. Will the Roman soldier have to insist that the Jew let him carry his own pack again?

The Way of Peace is not the way of submission. It is not tolerance of injustice. It is not surrender to evil. Neither is it responding to violence with more violence. It is neither fight nor flight, but the creative and courageous non-violent third way. And this way is also the way of love. Jesus prefaces his creative instructions to turn the other cheek and carry the load a second mile by saying, “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:37) Jesus did not say to be submissive in the face of evil, or to surrender when faced with violent aggression. But he did instruct us to seek the redemption of those who threaten us.

Martin Luther King, Jr. eloquently summed up this third way of Jesus in a sermon he preached at Dexter Ave. Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama on Christmas in 1957:

“To our most bitter opponents we say: ‘We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all

good conscience obey your unjust laws, because noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good.

Throw us in jail, and we shall still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you.

But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory."

O Lord, help us to follow you on the Way. Amen.