

“The Gospel of Peace”

Isaiah 2:1-9; Ephesians 6:14-16; 2 Thessalonians 3:16
Second Sunday of Advent - Peace

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December 10, 2017

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Whitehorse, Yukon

Meditation

The Biblical portrait of peace comes to completion with its central figure – the Prince of Peace. We hear of the Prince in the OT prophetic book, Isaiah 9:6&7:

For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given . . . And he will be called . . . Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

The prophecy is fulfilled and the Prince comes into our world and is manifested to us with the birth of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:14 proclaims: **For he is our peace.**

Now the peace established by the Prince through atonement is both vertical and horizontal.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, tells us: **Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son . . .**

Vertical peace, peace with God, is achieved by the incarnation (celebrated at Christmas); life; death on the cross; and resurrection out of the dead of Jesus Christ.

Likewise, the Prince of Peace establishes a horizontal peace

Paul's letter to the Ephesians: **Christ's purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross . . .**

The reference here is to the offspring of Abraham as the people of God and all who are not, those the Bible calls Gentiles (that's us!) – two different groups, hostility between them, but for all who are in Christ by faith - one before God.

The degree to which followers of Jesus appropriate his life in their life will result in the experience of peace both in a person's own life and between the person and others.

A horizontal peace

Now, the Biblical portrait does not stop at peace with God or with one another.

As we heard in the Isaiah chapter two prophecy the ultimate goal of the peace brought about by Jesus Christ is a peace extending among the nations of our world to such a degree, as the passage said:

They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation nor will they train for war any more.

It is difficult to fathom. On one hand the evidence for war and terror seems to never cease. On the other hand, to be human means to imagine and yearn for a peace wherein war and terror cease forever. In various places and times peace is experienced – within our country great peace resides. But never has peace been a global phenomenon.

We all felt this during last week. On one hand the United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. We may have thought of the Isaiah prophecies or the prophecies in the Book of

Revelation referencing Jerusalem. We thought of Psalm 122: **Pray for the peace of Jerusalem . . . may there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels.**

But on the other hand, we also thought of what most other governments in the world said about disturbing the peace process and the violent reactions of the Palestinian peoples.

Peace on earth is difficult to fathom.

It is one reason we Christians celebrate Advent: the coming of Christ into our world and with his arrival the hope that blossoms because we do experience peace with God through Christ and we do experience peace with one another because of the life of Christ. Even if it is not complete.

So, the remainder of the promise – peace on earth – is fervently held on to by faith and is the stand Christians take as we navigate through our life in our world.

This is what the Scripture in Ephesians calls for:

Stand firm then, . . . with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

The picture brings to mind the heavy military boot worn by the Roman Legions. Boots with which one could dig deep into the ground and hold off an attack.

The attack comes from very present forces of chaos and war, hence the military imagery. But the Christian, clothed with the attributes of Jesus, find a safe place in his peace.

Now, as a rule, we think of peace either as personal inner tranquility or the absence of war.

But, in the culture of Biblical people, inner tranquility and absence of war were only consequences of a more profound reality – peace had a dynamic life to it; it was referred to as **shalom**.

William Barclay comments: The biblical shalom conveys the picture of a circle, it means communal wellbeing in every direction and in every relation. It means reconciliation, the creation of just communities. It means the coming to pass of everything which makes for a person's highest good. The Jewish Rabbis held that the highest task which a person can perform is to establish right relationships between persons.

One of the main purposes for the Christian congregation to exist is so that shalom can be practiced and demonstrated.

We just have to consider the daily news feed; people are desperate for the hard-won reconciliation that produces peace. A very few familiar examples:

On a global scale reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians; on a national scale reconciliation between Canadians and First Nations; on a personal scale reconciliation between the genders.

With great diversity on many fronts – nationalities; gender; age; economics; personalities and culture that touch every distinctive we possess – there is a perfect stage for conflict, for warfare and for reconciliation. The Christian congregation exists for this purpose – to portray the hope reconciliation is possible – the Prince of Peace has shown the way, may we rejoice in it. Amen