

Second Sunday of Advent

Year A – Visions For Peace – No Shortcuts

- Isaiah 11:1-10 *A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse*
- Romans 15:4-13 *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing*
- Matthew 3:1-12 *Bear fruit worthy of repentance.*
- Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19 *He shall defend the needy ... rescue the poor*

Collect: Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Invocation: *Give ear O heavens and I will speak; let the earth hear the words of my mouth, for I will proclaim the Name of the Lord and ascribe greatness to our God.*

Wouldn't it be nice to have peace in the world?

No more war ... no more killing ... no more fighting between Christians and Muslims, Shiites and Sunnis, Buddhists and Hindus, Israelis and Palestinians; No more death marches ... No more suicide bombers ...

Wouldn't it be nice to have PEACE ON EARTH?

If we can't have PEACE ON EARTH,

How about peace in our families?

A week without arguing with your spouse?

A week without the kids fighting and arguing over every little thing?

Life – where tempers don't flare,

Where peace and harmony predominate?

Wouldn't that be lovely?

If we can't have peace on earth or in our families,
Wouldn't it be nice to have peace in the Church?

Surely we can have peace in the Church –
The land where the Prince of Peace rules with a velvet glove and
a gentle touch;

Where all are welcome – just as they are without one plea, and
where never is heard a discouraging word ... right?
Wouldn't that be wonderful?

If we can't have peace in the world, or in families, or in Church,
Wouldn't it be nice to have personal peace?

Wouldn't it be nice not to be so harsh on ourselves?
Wouldn't it be nice to not be so critical of shortcomings – after
all, we're only human?
Wouldn't it be nice NOT to have to over-drink, or over-eat, or
over-think?
Wouldn't it be nice to have peace of mind and peace of soul?
Wouldn't that be delightful?

Wouldn't it be nice to have some peace in our neighborhoods?
Wouldn't it be nice NOT to have to fret over rising prices? The COSTS
of Christmas shopping? Threats of foreclosures?

Increasingly young parents are shuffling all over the county asking
for help – presents for their kids for Christmas; help for power/phone
bills; help for rent; help for car repairs.

Wouldn't it be nice to have peace on the streets?
Wouldn't that be wonderful?

Don't you long for Peace in the world? Don't we all yearn for more peace? More security? More justice? More equity? More mercy? More kindness?

Isaiah felt the same way. Isaiah was a man who longed for peace, like a man in the desert longs for water, or a hungry woman yearns for bread, or a neglected child yearns for a warm embrace.

Isaiah lived around 700 BC. Believe it or not, there was fighting in the Middle East 2,700 years ago. Can you believe it?!

Israel vs. the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Hivites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites, (and Termites, for all we know!).

From the age of three, boys in the Middle East (and in many other cultures, I suspect) were taught the arts of war: How to fight and how to kill. Consider the word of God from one of the Psalms (18:33-42):

33 It is God who girds me about with strength *
and makes my way secure.
34 He makes me sure-footed like a deer *
and lets me stand firm on the heights.
35 He trains my hands for battle *
and my arms for bending even a bow of bronze.
*36 You have given me your shield of victory; *
your right hand also sustains me;
your loving care makes me great.*
*37 You lengthen my stride beneath me, *
and my ankles do not give way.*
38 I pursue my enemies and overtake them; *
I will not turn back till I have destroyed them.
*39 I strike them down, and they cannot rise; *
they fall defeated at my feet.*
40 You have girded me with strength for the battle; *
you have cast down my adversaries beneath me;
you have put my enemies to flight.

41 I destroy those who hate me;
 they cry out, but there is none to help them; *
 they cry to the LORD, but he does not answer.
42 I beat them small like dust before the wind; *
 I trample them like mud in the streets.

Imagine Isaiah's world; for 40 years watching people killing and being killed; plundering and being plundered.

Isaiah was sick of it – bone weary sick of it.
Isaiah longed for peace, just as a thirsty man longs for water; and as a hungry woman yearns for bread; and as an orphan child yearns for a family.

Have you ever wondered why we **yearn** for peace?

Isaiah knows: God made us for peace.

God made us to be at peace with all of creation.

God made us to be stewards of creation: to tend the plants; to care for all living things.

God made us in her image: a God of peace and harmony;

Not God in charge of Peace & Harmony, but God whose inner character is peace and harmony

(John 17: May THEY be one, as the Father & I are one).

When God created Adam & Eve, it was NOT so they could fight with each other, but so they could enjoy one another, help one another, support one another. Don't you think so?

That is why fighting seems so UNNATURAL.

Your guts churn; the adrenaline rushes; the face blushes; and your body screams for relief.

I've always admired those goats that, when you startle them, they just keel over. "If you're going to eat me, just get it over with.

Otherwise, just go away and I'll be fine." That's the way I feel about conflict.

So, if God created us for peace, what happened?

In a word: Sin.

Sin entered the world and wedged itself between us and God; and between us and our neighbors.

Sin says you're better than you really are.

Sin says your neighbor (wife, spouse, co-worker, immigrant, alien, fill-in-the-blank) is worse than they really are.

Sin says there is a problem, so fix it – better yet, fix blame!

Forget the rules; forget the costs; the ENDS justify the means.

Sin says "what's mine is mine, and what's yours OUGHT to be mine."

My home; my job; my family; my health; my country; my church;

My, my, my: No wonder there's no peace, says Isaiah.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

Isaiah dreamed of peace – Shalom.

Isaiah dreamed of a time

when the wolf would lie down with the lamb;
when the leopard would lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion and the fatling together;
with a child leading the parade.

The cow and the bear shall graze;

Their young shall lie down together;

The lion shall eat straw like the ox (so no blood needs to be shed);

A nursing child can play with snakes.

No longer will they hurt or destroy on God's holy mountain;

For THE EARTH will be full of the knowledge of the LORD

As the waters cover the sea.

So, what does it take to have peace – true peace – on the earth?

We go back to Genesis:

When God created the human race, God breathed on Adam (which means human, by the way), and Adam came alive – a living soul;

Life is dependent on God's Spirit.

When sin enters the world, the Spirit gets squeezed out, like water from a rag.

But every so often, we read of the Spirit touching a life here and there:

Abraham & Sarah are touched for a moment – and God's promise of an heir is kept.

Moses speaks to a bush that burns without being consumed – and God delivers on his promise to free those in bondage.

The Spirit of God falls upon 70 elders in the wilderness – and justice is served.

But these are mere moments in human history – flashes in the dark.

But in Isaiah's Dream, in Isaiah's vision,

The Spirit of God will come down and no longer will the Divine flame flicker for a moment on a person here, or a person there.

No, the Spirit of God will come down, says Isaiah, and fall on one person, and from that ONE, the Spirit of God will flow out over all the earth and drench the world AS AT THE BEGINNING – and we will know that the Holy One has done it.

It was not done by us; not by the cleverness of our minds, or the strength of our arms, but by the grace of God, and of God alone.

That ONE, of course, is Jesus.

He's the "reason for the season" – remember?

He placed his hands into the brood of vipers John the Baptist talked about in our Gospel reading. He stuck his hand into the vipers' den and drew the poison to himself so that you and I might have peace with God, and with one another, and (and here is the kicker) that we might live.

So, to have peace in your life; what is required?

I would suggest several possibilities of:

1) It's to live with the Prince of Peace, and to have the Prince of Peace live with you.

We should be willing to at least meet God half-way.

If God is peripheral, we can't have peace.

You know the song: What a friend we have in Jesus?

What I like most about my friends is they don't live with me; but true friends live here (in my heart). In truth, I want them to be at home in my house, and I want to be at home in theirs.

If God is a stranger though, and not a friend, it is hard to know the kind of peace that passes all understanding, isn't it? So we need God centered right here – right here in our hearts.

2) To have the Prince of Peace live with us requires change.

When Barb & I first started dating, I was a bachelor in EVERY sense of the word. My home looked like it. I could go ten years and never fill the bag on a vacuum! But when we got serious, life changed – for the better.

Was it to avoid fights? No, **it was to fulfill love.**

When the Prince of Peace comes into our lives, we see the world as the beloved sees it, and we deal with it. You don't cover it up, you clean it up. You don't toss it aside, you fix or replace it.

It's a process, but the rewards are worth it; the rewards are delightful, and they bring peace to heart, mind, and soul.

3) Finally, to have the Prince of Peace live with us means we've got to give up shortcuts.

Shortcuts don't work; they don't last. Try putting a button on your shirt using duct tape or Elmer's glue. It doesn't work! You've got to get a needle and thread; you've got to go through the process of threading the needle, sewing the button neatly onto the shirt, checking it out (and if it is too far out of alignment with the button hole, you rip it out and try it again).

If we want to have peace, we need the Prince of Peace to come live with us; we've got to put our house in order; and we've got to be committed fully to Righteousness and Justice – and invite others to join us on our journey of discovery. There is no shortcut that will get us there. We need the whole journey.

*“What does God require of us,” asks the prophet? (Micah 6:8)
“To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.”*

In tough times, the temptation is to learn to make and wage war; but let me leave you with a different perspective from another Psalm: (46:9-11):

9 Come now and look upon the works of the LORD, *
what awesome things he has done on earth.

10 It is he who makes war to cease in all the world; *
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear,
and burns the shields with fire.

11 "Be still, then, and know that I am God; *
I will be exalted among the nations;
I will be exalted in the earth."

What God calls of us is to bring our bows and arrows, our spears and shields, and toss them here before this altar that the Holy One may consume them with a refining fire.

To find peace is to lay down our weapons of war, and lower our shields so that we can look one another in the eye and see the other as God sees them, and so that others may look us in the eye and see what God sees, and together we can lie down in peace, and not in war or the spilling of blood.

Enough blood has been spilled in history, and the blood shed on Calvary's height is more than ever should have been spilled. We may not be able to stop wars "over there" (wherever "over there" is) but we can know peace in our lives, our homes, and in our church.

And so I end with one final thought from the Prophet Isaiah (41:10):
Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God ...
That's good enough for me. AMEN

*Delivered by the Rev. Keith Axberg to Saint Paul's Episcopal Church, Mount Vernon,
Advent 2 (12/07/2025)*