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Luke 1:57-79  
December 23, 2018

### Prince of Peace

Today we are continuing on our journey through Advent. It's hard to believe we have just one more day until we celebrate Jesus' birth. In some ways, the time has gone by very slowly. But in others, especially in these last days, it has sailed on by.

We've been talking each week about the four names given to the Messiah by the Prophet Isaiah. Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father. Today we consider him as our Prince of Peace. But what does that mean exactly? Prince of Peace?

The scripture story we are going to hear from is the birth of John the Baptist. To refresh our memories, Zechariah was a priest on duty in the Lord's temple. He and his wife were "along in years" and childless. The angel announced to Zechariah that they would conceive and have child named John, who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

Zechariah struggled to believe that God was powerful enough to make this happen and as a result was unable to speak throughout Elizabeth's pregnancy. Meanwhile Mary, Elizabeth's cousin also conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. We pick up the story today and Elizabeth was now due to deliver her promised child, John.

Would you join me as we read from Luke 1:57-79?

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

I am thinking this morning about the births of our children. Each was unique and none of them were as planned.

Just prior to their delivery, as all new parents we had a sense of excitement, expectancy, and hope. We had gone through our birthing classes. We had run through our birthing plan. We were well prepared.

But with every delivery that is also some uncertainty and fear. How would it all turn out? Would it go smoothly? Would mother and child be ok? As hard as all that was...and from my perspective...it seemed pretty darn hard, but I can't even begin to imagine how hard it must have been like for Karen. I do remember her main concern was, will I get to have that epidural on time?

Once the labor was over and the baby was safely in our arms, there was also this twenty four hour period of euphoric joy...stillness...quiet...calm...a peace that went beyond human understanding...a sense that all was well in our little world.

My heart was full of joy and praising God!

After the birth of John the Baptist, Zechariah's mouth was opened, his tongue loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. What came forth was an unguarded song of joy expressing his hopes and dreams for his newborn son. That he would...

Go on before the way of the Lord.

He would give people the knowledge of salvation.

He would shine God's light on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death.

He would guide our feet into the path of peace.

John the Baptist would do all of that as he preached repentance and forgiveness of sins. But how would he guide our feet into the path of peace? What does that mean?

Biblical peace or shalom is multifaceted.

We tend to think of peace simply being an inner calm or state of well being. Biblical peace, however, is active... more a state of living than just of being. With shalom we are to have peace with God, peace with ourselves, peace with one another, and peace with all of creation.

The story of humanity is evident that when we choose to sin, we are separated, alienated from God because of our evil behavior. The Apostle Paul described it to the Romans like this... Though we knew what was right, we often choose the opposite which sets us at odds with our Heavenly Father.<sup>1</sup>

But God had a plan to bring an end to our warfare. To reconcile us to himself through the sacrifice of his one and only Son, the Messiah.

This is what the Prophet Micah said about the Messiah...

"But you, Bethlehem, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel...

He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

And he will be their peace."<sup>2</sup>

So not only will the Messiah bring peace to us and God, but Jesus himself will be our peace.

The Apostle Paul said, "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 1

<sup>2</sup> Micah 5:2,4-5

<sup>3</sup> Romans 5:1

Do we feel at odds with God right? What if this Christmas, we accepted God's peace offering and welcomed the Prince of Peace to take up room in our hearts? How might that calm the warring nature in us?

Once we have peace with God, we can begin to make peace with ourselves.

But how? It could be as simple as reframing the way we talk to and of ourselves.

Everyone has to work at combating negativity that can sometimes lead us down unhealthy self-thinking. In other words, we may hear comments like "I'm not worth it. There's no use. I can't do it. I'll never follow through. People won't like me. I am not enough. I must be perfect. My opinion doesn't matter. I'll never be any different."

One writer suggests catching ourselves in the midst of negative self-talk and calling it what it is. For example, if you've just had the thought, "I am not enough." Simply say, "I just had the thought, that I am not enough." That puts the idea back into the category of mere thought and doesn't allow it to have more life than what's worth. We can take a deep breath, exhale the thought, and move on.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes, however, establishing peace with ourselves is far more complex than that. Sometimes we need the guidance of a trusted mental health counselor who can help us work through it all. They can help us discern what is truth and what is not. What we can change. And what we must accept. If you are ever wanting to do some of this kind of very important work, I can help get you connected to some good counselors who can help sort things out.

But know this, sometimes the process of establishing peace with ourselves muddies the waters even more because we tend to stir up the dirt from the bottom of the barrel. This both hard and good. But unless we stir it up, we can't accurately access what might be at the root of our lack of self-peace.

Mark tells the story in his Gospel when Jesus and his disciples were out on the water in a boat. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. It must have been quite a storm because these were fishermen in the boat with him who would have been used to such storms. But it was, these fishermen were afraid.

But Jesus was asleep in the stern.

The disciples cried out, "Jesus don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mike Bundrant, "Negative Self-Talk. Ten Things Not to Say to Yourself." Posted on PsychCentral website at <https://blogs.psychcentral.com/nlp/2013/04/negative-self-talk/>

<sup>5</sup> Mark 4:35-41

What storms are raging within us that are robbing us of the peace that Jesus brings? Are we reaching out to Jesus and asking him to calm our storms? Do we believe that he is powerful enough to cause them to be stilled?

Once we have made peace with ourselves, we are ready to be a channel of that peace toward one another.

Last week at the Love of God Living Bethlehem Drama, I told the story how I was a young officer in the US Navy in the 1980's. It was the height of the Cold War. The United States of America and the Soviet Union were enemies. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I would be a pastor as I am now. Further still, did I ever think that I would be in a church where both English and Russian would be spoken.

That my friends is the power of Jesus Christ, our Prince of Peace. The Apostle Paul wrote "For Jesus is our peace and has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostilities. He reconciled us with God through the cross. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through Jesus, we have peace with God, with each other, and with all of creation."<sup>6</sup> (My paraphrase).

In other words, The Prince of Peace comes declaring "Our warfare is over!"

Who are we still at war with today that we need the kind of peace that Jesus offers? Do we believe that if we reach out, Jesus will break down those hostilities and bring us peace? Not only peace, but Jesus will make us one. Former enemies can become God's children, brothers and sisters, in one family. Only Jesus could do that. Praise God.

I heard a story how after a very long and boring sermon, the parishioners filed out of the church saying nothing to the preacher. Towards the end of the line was a very thoughtful person who always commented on the sermons. "Pastor, today your sermon reminded me of the peace and love of God!" The pastor was thrilled. "No-one has ever said anything like that about my preaching before. Tell me why?"

"Well - it reminded me of the Peace of God because it passed all understanding and the Love of God because it endured forever."

The last kind of peace that the Messiah will bring is peace with all of creation.

The Prophet Isaiah painted a wonderful word picture of a world in which order was reestablished between humanity and creation and even within creation itself. In other words, the way it was back in the Garden of Eden before the fall of humankind.

He wrote, "The wolf will lie down with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.

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<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 2:14

The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

The infant will play near the whole of the cobra and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."<sup>7</sup>

In other words, prey and prey animals coexisting in perfect harmony.

How might God be inviting us to join the Prince of Peace in experiencing God's shalom this Christmas season?

We are not only to look forward to this, but we are to work toward this. But we also need to know that it won't be fully realized until Jesus, the Prince of Peace, returns at his Second Coming. Then he will set everything back into its proper balance.

Our closing song today, "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" was written by Charles Wesley, founder of the Methodism, and speaks about this reset. Published in 1744, it was written in time when many were suffering in hunger and poverty. There were orphans all around him. The distinction between the classes was distinct and large. He also knew a world in which slavery was allowed. It seemed that in the more than 1,700 years since the Lord had come, there was very little peace in the world.

And yet the song in his heart was one that looked forward to the day when Jesus would come push the reset button and set God's people free from our sin and fears. To find our rest in God alone. That is the hope that we have in this Advent Season.

So may we believe that God has extended his hand of peace to us through Jesus Christ. May we be instruments of this peace to ourselves and to others. And may we long to see the day when peace is restored within all of creation.

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus, Come. We are expecting you.

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<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 11:6-9