

Advent Peace

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

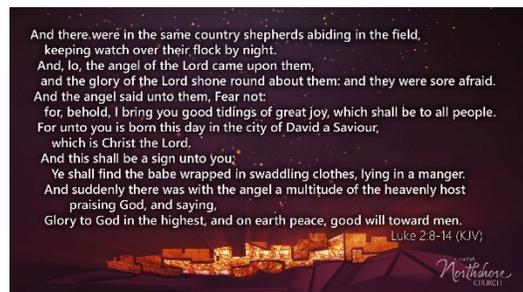
¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”¹

And on earth peace... peace on earth. The second Sunday of Advent is marked by the traditional theme of peace. So we add to the light of last week's candle (the theme of hope) the light of this week's candle for peace.

These four simple Advent themes (Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love) are the kinds of things we all want... for ourselves, for those we love, and for all people. With such an expansive view, inclusive of all people, let's get the big picture on today's theme: Peace.

We are grateful to Linus for today's reading from the Gospel of Luke (2:8-14), recounting that when the angel announced the coming of Jesus the Messiah to those shepherds that starry night, it was an announcement of **peace**.

¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace,
Good will toward men.²



¹ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Lk 2:8–14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² *The Holy Bible: King James Version*. (2009). (Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version., Lk 2:14). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

It turns out that when the Charlie Brown Christmas Special put those holy words in the mouth of Linus, it wasn't out of a context of peace, but something more like chaos. In the month before I was born (June 1965) a business partner of Charles Shultz sold CBS this special. The only problem was *that it didn't exist*. Not one drawing... not even one word of a script had been written. There really wasn't even a template to produce such a thing. Schultz and his team plowed new ground and wrote new rules as they quickly produced the special.

They broke rules too... including the biggest rule. What is television for? TV is for selling stuff! Charlie's special was a war against the thin commercialization of Christmas in favor of the real meaning of Christmas. Charlie was biting the hand that fed him... or at least fed the artists behind him.

And how did they convey the real meaning of Christmas? They went to the primary source, with Linus reciting part of the Christmas narrative from Luke 2.

They forged a whole new way, and worked like crazy to produce the special... past all the deadlines but in time for airing. The execs from CBS saw it at the last minute... and they *hated* it. It was deemed a failure before it even hit the airwaves, a failure amplified by the heavy promotion already put into the project. They thought about *pulling the plug*, but went ahead and aired it. Their promotion had worked, and nearly half of television viewers tuned in. And, of course, they loved it! The true meaning of Christmas prevailed, and it prevails today too!

¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace,
Good will toward men.³

Peace, proclaimed boldly, or cleverly *snuck in*, is a powerful, compelling message. Peace is a huge concept that has applications in every area of life.

³ *The Holy Bible: King James Version*. (2009). (Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version., Lk 2:14). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

First, we can think of peace in terms of peace with our surroundings (ecology). We have a great deal of power to put us at peace with nature. Just today:

- Lights & Shower
- Food & Clothing
- Dog happy to see me
- Heated Transportation



It takes some work and resources, but we can usually attain a comfortable level of peace with our environment... and when calamity strikes, there is usually help. Even in some of the most devastating circumstances (like natural disaster), given time, we have a way of restoring ecological peace.

We can think of peace in terms of our fellow humans (justice). We have a great deal of power in that arena as well. We build elaborate systems to keep the peace. They run a spectrum including:

- Cultural norms, ways and customs
- Rules of the road
- Civil law
- Criminal law
- And even, on the most macro scale, rules for warfare

We are surrounded, even ruled, by elaborate systems to obtain and keep peace. I think we usually take most of these things for granted, until a system fails. And then we have systems for restoring peace, ranging from the most formal in our courts, to mediation and mitigation, to everyday forgiveness or even merely overlooking faults in others.

So in these broad brush strokes, we strive for ecological peace (peace with our surrounding environment) and justice (peace among people) and then there is a third peace: ***spiritual*** peace.

Just as we strive and build elaborate systems for peace with our environment and peace among people... we strive and build elaborate systems for spiritual peace. We work toward peace with our God. Christian people like us do so... building rules and systems and even cultures designed to make peace with God.

All religions do it. Some do it through disciplines, rulemaking and rule keeping, others by sacrifice, and still others by various kinds of meditation and worship. I suppose that might be a clear simple definition of **religion**: our striving to make peace with God.

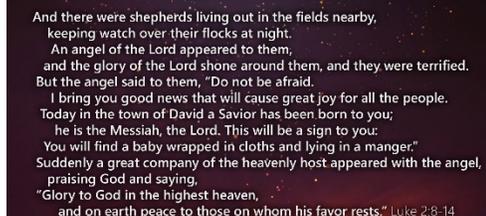
But especially during this season, this season of Advent, of anticipation, leading up to Christmas... this is a season when we are confronted with the reality that our conceptions of peace likely need to be realigned. It may be natural for us to think that it is **our** striving for peace with God that matters. But during this season, as we confront the heart of the Christmas story again, we are reminded again that Advent Peace, true peace with God, is something entirely different.

It turns out that Advent Peace, true peace with God, is not merely an idea or a feeling. It is not a system or a structure... not a formula or even a discipline. Advent Peace isn't anything so abstract or complex. Advent Peace is a **person**: Jesus, our Savior, Christ, and Messiah.

Advent Peace, true peace with God, is about knowing Jesus, and fully embracing and enjoying the peace that only He brings and freely gives.

When the angels announced His arrival, praising God and saying:

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor
rests.” ⁴



And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Luke 2:8-14

It was more than a mere announcement that there would be peaceful conditions... that maybe wars would cease, or persecution or striving dampened. This was an announcement that the Promised Gift, spoken of by the prophets long ago and throughout the ages, was on the scene. A child was born. A son was given. God showed up!

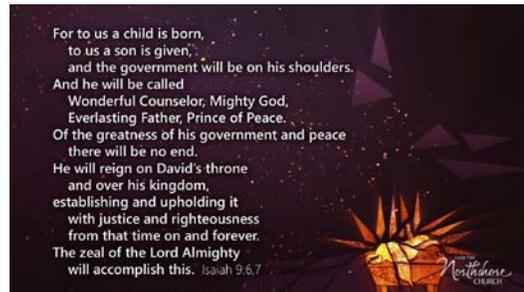
It was *unusual* in that it was so **normal**: a helpless babe born in humble circumstances. Arriving in the most nonthreatening, way... the *normal* way as a baby... not even a royal, rich, or privileged way. But this was certainly an extraordinary child with extraordinary names.

⁴ The New International Version. (2011). (Lk 2:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

His name, given by Joseph at the direction of God's messenger-angel, would be Jesus.

But He would also live up to the names prophesied by Isaiah:

- Wonderful Counselor
- Mighty God
- Everlasting Father
- Prince of Peace



Jesus would not only teach about peace, nor would he merely bring peace... Jesus **is** peace. He is the Peace of God **personified**. He is our peace.

As He lived and grew, He was further revealed to be **God in the flesh**. A special, holy baby became a remarkable man... fully God and fully man for a special purpose: to **be** peace.

- Was He a great leader, leading people in the way of peace? Yes... but more than that.
- Was He a great teacher/philosopher/theologian showing people the way of peace? Yes... but more than that.

Jesus **is** our peace, not because he merely taught us a way or even led us in a way; Jesus is our peace because **He is the Way**. Jesus is peace and is the only way to peace with God.

More than merely giving us new ideas or rules to make peace with God, He became the Way to peace with God. More than merely telling us how we might deal with our sin and disobedience and shortcomings and failings so we could strive toward peace with God... Jesus took on our sin, disobedience, shortcomings, and failings. He paid the price so that we can embrace and enjoy peace with God.

Here's a concise, theological statement from Romans 5:

since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,⁵

Through faith in Jesus, what Jesus accomplished through his coming as the babe in Bethlehem, and living, and suffering death on the Cross, and conquering death with Resurrection... all that Jesus accomplished is given to all who believe. His righteousness is counted as our righteousness through faith in Him... just as if I had never sinned. The life that Jesus lived is credited to you and me before God through faith in Him. This is peace with God... it is only through our Lord Jesus Christ. Not through our striving or whatever religious things we might do... but through Jesus by faith... God's mercy and grace freely given to us... first showing up on the scene, born of the Virgin Mary, the Babe in Bethlehem.

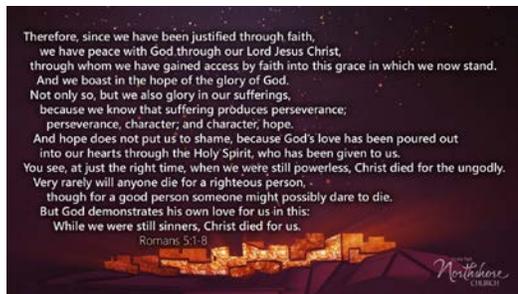
Not only does this profound fact that we celebrate at Christmas change our perspective on peace with God, it impacts those other ways of considering peace that we talked about earlier as well. God's Word promises comprehensive, all-encompassing peace.

Jesus will *show up* with justice. Are we experiencing that justice now? Maybe in some small part... but this justice is a promise for His coming again, His Second Advent, at the final resolution of creation. It is then that true, full justice will be finally realized as Isaiah prophesied in chapter 11:

with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor
of the earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.⁶



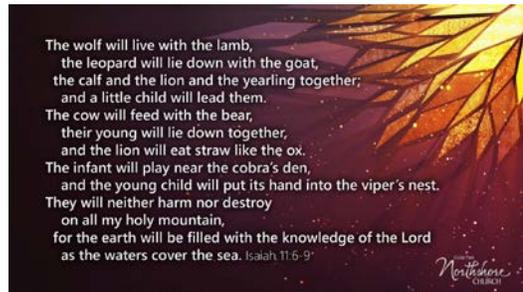
⁵ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 5:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ The New International Version. (2011). (Is 11:4-5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The justice that we strive for, peace among all people, will in that great day be delivered as an act of God's mercy and judgment.

And peace with all nature will also be fully realized in that great day. Reading on in Isaiah 11:

for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of
the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.⁷



The peace with our surroundings that we strive for, ecological peace, will also be delivered as an act of God's grace.

⁶The wolf will live 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.

⁷The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

⁸The infant will play near the cobra's den,
the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.⁸

It would be easy to regard this as merely some sort of poetic fantasy... but I believe it is more than a metaphor. This is a promise of the all-encompassing redemption that the Lord has in store for creation and those who have peace with God, justified through faith in Jesus.

That will be **then**, in that great day, and this is **now**... what do we do in the meantime? So what? (since I always have to ask).



⁷ The New International Version. (2011). (Is 11:9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁸ The New International Version. (2011). (Is 11:6-8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

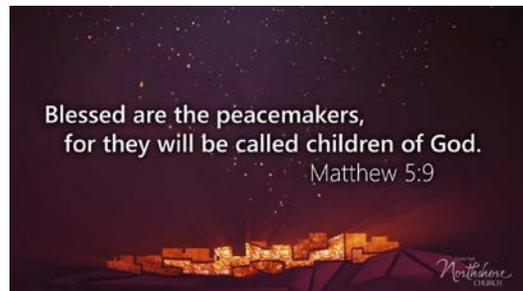
This Advent season reminds us that the Peace of God has come and lives, personified in Jesus. And that Peace is ours to embrace and enjoy through faith. But the full and final, all-compassing promised peace is not yet among us, and will not be ours until Jesus returns in that great day.

What about today, and our tomorrows until that great day?

I think we can start with the words of Jesus, doing what we can to fulfill His calling in our lives.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called us to be peacemakers. Jesus said:

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God. ⁹

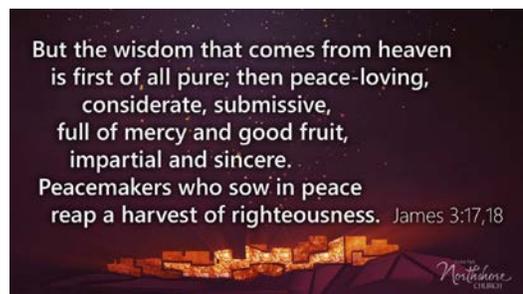


By faith, we have peace with God; we are children of God. Children of God are peacemakers.

I like the way James puts it:

¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness. ¹⁰



We are peacemakers who sow in peace. I think that is the perfect picture for us. We, who are God's children, recipients of God's grace, bear the **seeds** of peace.

We, then, sow and cultivate seeds of peace. And just like the parable that you may know from the Gospels (the Words of Jesus) about seeds and a sower, some of those seeds fall on good ground, while others fall on hard ground or rocky soil. Some of the seeds result in fruit, while others never take hold and yet others are overtaken by weeds or stolen away by birds or other enemies of seeds. But there is fruit (good fruit) because the farmer faithfully sowed seeds.

⁹ The New International Version. (2011). (Mt 5:9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁰ The New International Version. (2011). (Jas 3:17–18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

I like the picture of sowing seeds of peace for all sorts of reasons, including:

- Our responsibility is to sow; the harvest is not all in our hands. We plant and cultivate as we can, but just like sowing any seed in the ground is an act of faith (even a risky act of faith) sowing seeds of faith are an act of faith.
- It takes time. We can so easily be so very impatient when we are sowing seeds of peace. We are looking for a magic seed that works every time, right away. But that is not the way in God's creation. Sowing and reaping takes time.
- It most often takes a team effort. Some sow, others cultivate, still others may water, and it could be someone else who reaps. But in all of it, God is glorified and peace ultimately prevails.

So as we go about our days and work, striving to make peace in our various environments, among our people, we do well in whatever ways we can to think of our striving in terms of sowing seeds of peace.

When we are dealing with challenging relationships, let's ask God to help us think more in terms of sowing seeds of peace rather than merely surviving another day.

When we are balancing a spreadsheet, or repairing a machine, or renovating a building, or pruning a tree (whatever our hands are doing), let's ask God to help us think and act more in terms of sowing seeds of peace. This is our calling as peacemakers, children of God.

Let's purpose to both receive peace and sow seeds of peace. In a few moments we'll have opportunity to respond to God with an invitation to Communion.



- Today is a day to believe! This could be your day to turn to Jesus, or turn back to Jesus, receiving peace with God.
- We all can purpose, and repurpose, to sow seeds of peace.

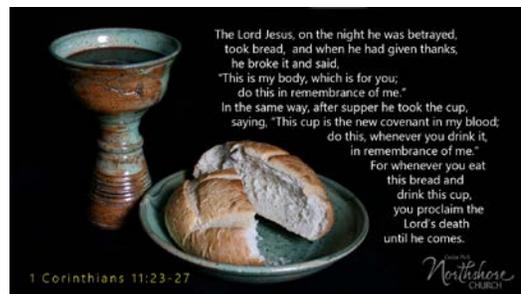
On this first Sunday of the month, we are invited to Communion... doing what Jesus ordained in remembrance of Him.

The invitation to Communion is an invitation to peace.

The bread and the cup symbolize the body and blood of Jesus, the purchase of our peace. When we receive the bread and the cup, literally making it part of our bodies, we believe, receive, and remember again the price of peace, paid by the Prince of Peace. Remember. Receive. And Believe.

And let us also take this moment to commit ourselves to the *process of peace*. We, too, are called to commitment and sacrifice... possibly to even bleed and die in some ways as we put others before ourselves. God does not call us to bleed and die for Him so that we might attain some righteousness; Jesus has already done that for us, and only Jesus could do it. Nevertheless, God does call us to demonstrate that same kind of love in pursuit of peace. Peace in all our relationships that ultimately leads others to receive the peace of God, by faith, through Jesus. Come. Remember, receive, and believe... and commit to our part as children of God, peacemakers sowing seeds of peace.

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. ¹¹



¹¹ The New International Version. (2011). (1 Co 11:23–26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.