

Advent Week 2

REDISCOVERING PEACE IN OUR STRUGGLES

The second Sunday of Advent signifies peace and reminds us that Jesus came to bring peace and God's favor to humanity. We will spend the next seven days during this week of Advent concentrating on and rediscovering God's peace. In addition to the daily devotions, take time this week to light the second candle in your Advent wreath. In a world that seems to be filled with anxiety, conflict, and uncertainty more than peace, allow God to be your peace. Whatever circumstances you are facing, let the peace of Christ be your comfort, rest, and refuge.



For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. — Isaiah 9:6

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.”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” — Luke 2:8-15



What does peace mean in our world? What does peace look like in your life?



I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

—John 16:33



"Silent Night"

8

UNSTOPPABLE PEACE

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”
—Luke 2:14

It’s kind of a miracle that *A Charlie Brown Christmas* ever got made, much less aired on national television. We know it as a beloved Christmas tradition, but in 1965, the TV executives were sure it was going to flop. They thought it was too slow. The now iconic jazz music didn’t belong in a cartoon. The voices were too amateurish. Charlie Brown and his pals used too big a vocabulary. And Linus can’t quote the Bible on TV. Even Charles Schultz’s own creative team tried to talk the illustrator out of that scene, but Schultz would not be dissuaded. Because Coca-Cola had bankrolled the show and TV guides had already listed it, CBS execs had no choice but to reluctantly air it.

As you know, the show was a hit. Its triumph was Linus announcing to Charlie Brown “That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown,” and proclaiming to the world the words of the angels from that first Christmas night:

“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 2:10-14).

That message is the same for us today. It’s OK. You don’t have to be afraid. Christ has come. Peace is here. Let’s rest in that enduring promise throughout this Advent season.

What restores your sense of peace? How can you take a daily pause to refocus and let God’s peace wash over you?



THE PEACE OF WHOLENESS

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

—John 14:27

Don't you love those moments when everything seems right with the world? Maybe it's when your baby is sleeping in your arms. Maybe it's holding your spouse close after a long absence. Maybe it's when your children are home from college, together again. Maybe it's the whole family laughing together at Christmas. Or maybe it's after all the in-laws go home again.

In the Jewish culture, peace is much more than the absence of conflict. It's more like those brief moments of everything being right in your world. The Old Testament word is *shalom*, used still today as a greeting and a blessing. The concept of *shalom* is a concept of wholeness. It is an understanding that life is complex with many moving pieces, responsibilities, relationships, and more, but in *shalom* there is completeness, unity, safety—peace. Through the giving of the Law to Moses and God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants, there was God's *shalom*, restoration, relationship, and spiritual wholeness. And in the coming of the Messiah, the Prince of *Shalom* would realize this sense of ultimate peace.

So you can be sure the disciples remembered and clung to Jesus's words in the days after His death and resurrection. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." This was His *shalom* that would calm their hearts and overcome their fears, even when the world reeled around them. Jesus knew the hard times and even horrific days that lay ahead for His disciples, but He wanted them to know His Spirit would sustain them with peace. He knew the work of complete restoration He was accomplishing. It's the same work He is working in us. Jesus is making us whole. His peace can calm our hearts and overcome our fears.

What is making you afraid? How can you speak words of peace, shalom, today?

10

PEACE REIGNS

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
—Isaiah 9:6

A young priest named Joseph Mohr took the long way home one winter night in 1816, less than a year after the ravages of the Napoleonic Wars. As Mohr looked out across the scene, he was struck with a profound sense of peace. Snow blanketed the small village in the Alps. Candlelight glowed from cottage windows. Smoke trailed skyward from cozy hearths within. Overhead, countless stars twinkled with radiance. When he got home, Mohr wrote the lyrics we now know as “Silent Night.”

Two years later, Mohr asked his friend and choir director Franz Gruber to write a melody for guitar. And on Christmas Eve 1818 in Oberndorf, Austria, the two performed “Stille Nacht Heilige Nacht” at the evening mass. The carol’s startling simplicity captivated listeners. Traveling folk singers began to spread the song, and eventually it crossed continents and languages. In 1914, soldiers during World War I, came out of their trenches and crossed the battle lines to sing “Silent Night” together in French, German, and English in a profound evening of peace.

We know that not all was peaceful on that first Christmas night. There was a frantic search for lodging after a grueling journey forced by a foreign government. There was the pain and exhaustion of labor and childbirth. There was terror at the angels first appearance. But there must also have been moments of profound silence as a new mother cradled her sleeping son and breathed in the newborn scent of his head. The shepherds must have felt it as they settled their flocks again in the fields, filled with wonder and gazing into the sparkling night sky. Sometimes it’s in the darkness and silence that we are most aware that the Prince of Peace rules.

When is the last time you listened to “Silent Night?” How can you set aside a few moments to step into the peace of this son who has been given, the Prince of Peace?

11

PEACE TRANSCENDS

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
—Philippians 4:6–7

“**How can this be?**” Mary asked the angel, according to Luke. It must roughly translate to, “Wait! What?! Conceive...give birth...Son of the Most High? How can I have a baby?! Everybody knows there’s only one way to have a baby!”

We don’t know exactly how or when Mary told Joseph. Apparently it didn’t go well. Joseph was crushed. The betrayal stung beyond words. How could Mary do this? He loved her. He didn’t want to hurt her, but he couldn’t take this pain of his own. He wouldn’t make a public scene, but he would break off the engagement, the equivalent of a divorce in the marriage process and customs of the day.

You know what happened. There were angels and messages directly from God, and both Mary and Joseph chose to believe them and trust. But you also know how people are. If Joseph had a hard time believing Mary’s story, just think about their neighbors and customers and townsfolk. Both Mary and Joseph must have been targeted with their scorn and judgment. It wouldn’t have been an easy nine months. It wouldn’t have been an easy journey to Bethlehem by foot or by donkey. It wouldn’t have been an easy parenting journey.

But Mary and Joseph continued to trust. They continued to stay faithful. The questions and uncertainty must have continued to come too. And they must have continued to remember God’s work they had witnessed. They must have thanked Him for all they had seen. They must have prayed and petitioned God, turning their focus on Him. We know the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guarded their hearts and minds even in their most difficult moments—just as He has promised it will do in ours.

What are you feeling anxious about? What is your prayer and request from God today?

12

THE PAUSE OF PEACE

And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.

—Mark 4:37-39 (NKJV)

Have you ever experienced a hurricane? Have you ever passed through the eye of a hurricane? It's an eerie experience. There truly is a stillness right at the center of a circling hurricane. After the worst of the storm comes a stillness. The eye is surrounded by the eyewall, a ring of towering, ferocious thunderstorms that are the violent vortex of humid air that feeds the hurricane. But then the winds calm. The rains cease. It's a pause in the maelstrom. It's temporary. But it's kind of like those freeze frame moments in a movie when everything slows down to one brief moment of reality while life or chaos or catastrophe happen all around the character like a brief millisecond of clarity.

Jesus has the power to calm our storms. Even in the worst of the gales howling around us. The disciples experienced it physically in that storm at sea with Jesus. We can experience it spiritually. "Peace, be still," Jesus says. As we cry out to Him, He is able to bring calm to the winds that rage within and around us. He is able to bring pause and clarity. Jesus is our peace, no matter how bad the storm we are facing.

What storm are you facing? How will you pause today to, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10)?

13

PLANTING PEACE

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. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.
—James 3:17-18

When their small boat set sail in Chile to cross the notoriously treacherous Drake Passage to Antarctica, there was so much that could go wrong. The 2004 expedition would attempt to be the first to climb an unnamed peak in Antarctica. First, they had to trek by foot for weeks across the ice. Most had no sailing or mountaineering experience. And all of them came from opposite sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The “extreme peace mission” was the idea of Heskell Nathaniel, an Israeli outdoorsman, and sponsored by Israel’s Peres Centre for Peace. But the group was not made of peace activists. Some had served in different armies and served time for attacks on the other side. Others were political activists. Some had lost family members in bombings. But they had to work together for success and survival. “I’m not so naive as to believe we will bring peace,” one of the team members said. “But I think it will push forward other groups of people to go ahead and talk, just sit and talk.”

The crew was ultimately successful in summiting its peak and raising awareness for Israeli-Palestinian cooperation and potential peace. But first they had to be willing to extend grace, mercy, forgiveness, and trust to their teammates from across the border. These are qualities of “wisdom that comes from heaven,” as James describes them. And he likens the process of finding peace to planting: When we plant and cultivate peace, we harvest and experience righteous fruit.

Often peace means taking the first step and planting the seeds of peace one at a time.

What conflict is keeping you from shalom wholeness? What step of forgiveness or grace will you take to cultivate peace or heal a relationship?

14

THE INVITATION TO PEACE

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.
—Matthew 11: 28-30

The shepherds gained a special place in history on the night of Jesus's birth, but in their time, they were nothing special as far as society was concerned. The shepherds were the everyman, the working class. They labored under the sun and stars. They tended animals. They probably smelled like the animals they kept. They had no entitlement. They were probably looked down on by the religious elite. And they probably would have immediately understood and embraced the agricultural example in Jesus's teaching years later: the yoke of walking in step with Jesus and following His lead. They would have embraced his invitation to come and find rest. They were weary with the burden of never-ending labor and scratching out a living in the fields.

What an invitation to peace! "For I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls."

It was no accident that the angels showed up above the fields outside of Bethlehem to make their proclamation of "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." It was a triumphant signal that God was there for the humble and lowly and weary and broken. Those people had a place in the stable to encounter the Messiah.

Jesus's invitation extends to us today. We can come and experience the deep rest of His peace.

What burden feels heavy right now? What step will you take as Jesus welcomes, "Come to me"?