

Peace – Advent II

Last week we lit the first Candle of Advent ... the candle of **Hope**. I had a moment last week when I was unexpectedly filled with Hope. I was driving and one of the hosts on the radio station I was listening to began talking to her co-host about **Advent calendars!** I turned the radio up! I was happy to hear that ... how wonderfully surprising ... how timely ... how appropriate! Then things went south very quickly. The host started talking about parents putting candy, or chocolate bars, or small toys in each section of the Advent calendar for their kids. Hmmmm ... that's a bit disappointing ... but I get it. I wonder what these kids think Advent is. And then, the host began speaking about a great idea she had heard where an adult got an Advent calendar for their partner, and in each pocket, she put a different kind of beer! I have nothing against beer! But I am very much against Christian Christmas traditions getting hijacked by the secular world with no reference to or understanding of its Christian origins. I was even more

offended that the Advent Calendar was being filled with something to which many people become addicted and over which lives and families are torn apart. This is what, for some, Advent and Advent Calendars have become. I wonder how many people have any idea what the meaning of Advent is and what Advent calendars were originally intended for!!! I changed the radio station!

So let's change the station here today from chocolate and beer, and get back to the original meaning of this very important time in the life of the Christian church.

Advent – coming, the arrival of a notable person or thing.

Hope, Peace, Joy, Love – Preparing for love to be born anew.

Today we light the candle of **Peace!**

Depending upon when you were born, the word Peace will have a particular meaning. I was born in 1952. As a young teenager, my super cool friends and I would flash Peace signs to one another. Many of us would wear Peace symbols hanging on a chain or cord of some kind

around our neck. We had T shirts, hats, or backpacks that had a Peace sign on them.

What comes to mind when you think of Peace?

Luke 2:14 says, "Glory to God in the heavenly heights,
Peace to all men and women on earth who please him."

Matthew 5:9 says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

We need to know what the Bible means by the word Peace and we need to know what it means for you and for me to be Peacemakers.

As if we didn't know it, life is messy and sometimes it can get very complicated. Sometimes feeling anything resembling inner peace is the furthest thing from our minds. Sometimes, we are just trying to survive, and ride through the chaos. We might wonder if aspirations of attaining a sense of peace from God and being peacemakers is simply just setting ourselves up for failure!

A single parent with a low paying job and 3 young kids –

A harried manager working excessively long hours and going home to a volatile relationship –

A struggling high school or university student with a schedule that is crammed to the hilt –

A family where the conflict is bubbling below the surface and everyone knows it but don't know how to fix it –

Someone called me this week and apologized for not having the time to return my text from 3 days ago ... he had no time –

And you and I are called to light the candle of Peace, have the Peace of Christ in our hearts, Peace in our relationships, Peace in our daily living ... Sometimes that seems like a very big ask!

The Hebrew word for Peace is Shalom. It is a word that is not just about the absence of conflict, or quiet, but a word much fuller and richer in meaning. It implies wholeness and completeness. It implies

justice and righteousness. (By righteousness, I mean, being right with God). The great Hebrew prophet Isaiah had a vision about righteousness and peace. He said that when a **just and righteous** King would come to reign over Israel, God's Spirit would be poured out on all people. Justice has to do with equality and fairness for all people.

Justice. Righteousness. Peace. When these elements reign in our hearts and our lives, we have an intimate fellowship with God and that is a peace that does in fact pass all understanding.

I want you to recall a moment when you felt like that ... Peace, deep, relaxing, so satisfyingly wonderful.

God created the world as a place of peace, justice, harmony, relationship ... justice, equality, harmony ...

But we have gone so far off the rails. We have become a place of 'whoever has the most toys at the end of the day wins'!

Advent Calendars filled with beer are the least of our problems!

Remember this famous couple named Adam and Eve? You can read about them in Genesis 2. They wanted more than they were given, and they were given so much to begin with. But it was not enough. Their greed and disobedience lead to serious consequences that would forever change not only their lives, but the entire world. Their decisions derailed God's plan for Creation.

I do not use the word sin very often, but when I do, I understand it to mean anything we think or do that would be considered an offence to God's will for our lives – knowing God's will, and choosing to do the opposite. That is what Adam and Eve did. God had given them a paradise to enjoy and in which to flourish. He had one request – enjoy all that is here, except for the fruit of this one tree ... just this **one!** You can have everything else! Nope, not enough! They chose to disobey his one and only request. They chose to sin. In doing so they threw all that God had created into chaos. We have been trying to bring order to that chaos ever since.

Adam and Eve were meant to live in peace with God and to enjoy life to its fullest. We are meant to live in peace with God and with one another. But there are these behaviours like greed, dishonesty, selfishness ... they get a toe hold on our lives and they are so difficult to get rid of.

Remember that prophet from the Old Testament – Isaiah? In chapter 53 he made reference to the one who was to come ... ‘God’s Suffering Servant ... a man of sorrows, acquainted with bittersweet grief. He was crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace. God would restore peace on earth through the one who took upon himself the penalty of the sin of all people for all time.’

The price of peace on earth – I wonder when we sing about peace on earth, goodwill to men – do we ever consider the price that was paid for peace? When we sing the carols, when we sing about the manger, do we ever think about the cross? (Col 1:19-20) For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and by him God reconciled

everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of his blood on the cross.

What are we prepared to do, to bring peace? – in our homes, our relationships, in our communities and in our world?

Is there someone with whom you need to make Peace?

Is there something you might do, to increase the Peace quotient in any of your relationships, or in any circumstances you might know of?

Is there a way that you might bring Peace to someone whose name you do not even know? Peace Shalom a deep stillness, a sense that God is present.

We need to realize that Peace is not an automatic by-product just because a baby was born in a manger. Peace is not a by-product of Christmas cheer and happy thoughts. Jesus' birth was a pre-requisite to his final peace-making effort. Should we not recognize at Christmas time that which we focus on in Holy Week?

You might remember this illustration that I have used before. It was July. A couple were just strolling the streets of a cute little village. They came upon a Christmas shop – you know, one of those stores that sell Christmas ornaments and decor all year round. Down in a bottom corner of the front window there was an antique looking little sign. It read Christmas Spoken Here. Christmas Spoken Here? What might that mean. Kindness perhaps. Generosity. Joyfulness. Gratitude. Thanksgiving. Hopefulness. Love. Might it be possible for our words and our actions to reflect the language of Christmas all year long?

(Read Cross in the Manger by Ann Weems)

Amen