

**ADVENT SERMON SERIES
FROM HEAVEN ABOVE
(2) THE GIFT OF PEACE**

Isaiah 52:7-10

Colossians 1:15-20

John 14:25-27

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(with material from Dean Nadasdy, used by permission)

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SCRIPTURE

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” ⁸ Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion. ⁹ Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. ¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God (Isaiah 52:7-10 NRSV).

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in^ε him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:15-20 NRSV).

²⁵“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid (John 14:25-27 NRSV).

MESSAGE

"I just need a little peace and quiet!" How often have you heard those words? Perhaps

you said them yourself?

U-2's song, "Peace on Earth," has the lyric:

"Heaven on Earth/We need it now/I'm sick of all of this/Hanging around/Sick of sorrow/Sick of pain/Sick of hearing again and again/That there's gonna be/Peace on Earth."

Since the angels sang of peace over Bethlehem's fields, peace has been elusive for many. It can seem to be a promise unkept, a dream never realized.

Maybe, just maybe, though, we don't see peace on earth because we don't understand it. When Jesus says, "Peace I give to you," He also makes it clear that his peace is different from the world's peace. The peace Jesus gives us is "beyond human understanding" (Philippians 4:7). His gift of peace, in other words, is always a bit more than its recipients can grasp. It is a product of neither our wisdom nor our culture. Jesus says, "Not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27).

Yet the peace Jesus gives is a gift. The peace Jesus offers is not won by our diplomacy or hard-fought battles. His peace is a matter of grace. It is to be received like a gift. Grace and peace are often partners in the Bible. They frequently show up in the same sentence. There is no real peace without grace. In the early days of the church a common greeting among Greek-speaking people was "Charis," or "Grace." Among Hebrew-speaking folks the greeting was "Shalom," or "Peace." Amazingly in Christ, Gentile and Jew came together, and the greeting, "Grace and peace to you," used often by the apostle Paul, was evidence of their reconciliation in Christ.

The peace that Jesus gives is not the absence of trouble. This heart-warming, mind-rebooting gift often comes in the middle of trouble, not at the end of it. Times are when the peace Jesus gives doesn't make the pain or the crisis go away. Rather it is what gets us through the storm.

I remember when my niece, Peggy, was dying of cancer. She was a person with a strong faith and a great sense of humor. A couple of months before she died we were visiting her at the Oncology Center where she was staying. She said, "I never won anything in my life. The Center had a drawing for a prize and I entered. Guess what? I won! You wanna know what the prize was? A calendar watch?" Then her voice cascaded into giggles. A few moments later she asked, "What am I going to do with a calendar watch?" And she giggled some more.

Peggy did not want to die but she was not afraid to die. She was thankful for the peace that God had given her. It was a far greater prize than any drawing or raffle could ever provide.

To say that Jesus gives us peace is also to say that his peace is a matter of relationship. The New Testament describes Jesus Himself as "our peace" (Ephesians 2:14). In other words, the peace we have comes to us in a person. Jesus is our peace because He has reconciled us to God. His sacrificial death and his victorious resurrection have made us right with God. Paul simply exalts in this peace as he writes, "For in him (Christ) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:19-20).

The same is true in our relationship with others. Just as Jesus reconciles us to God, He gives us the power to forgive and to reconcile with others. For Christians, peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22), cultivated by our relationship with Christ. Jesus, who is our peace with God, makes peacemakers of us all. This no doubt is why Paul encourages us in Colossians 3:15 to "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." Knowing peace with Christ makes peace with others possible.

On Christmas Eve, 1914, German, French, English, and Belgian troops began singing Christmas carols across No Man's Land. Eventually they would step out of their trenches on the Western Front of WW I and greet their enemies. Corroborated in many soldiers' diaries, the Christmas Truce of 1914 brought shared meals, impromptu soccer games, and the burial of fallen comrades. Though it only lasted for a few days, it has become a symbol of our deep, deep need for peace in the midst of turmoil. It also shows how peace on earth begins with Christ and just a few who know its power. Years later, a British veteran of that silent night said in 1930, "I then came to the conclusion that I have held very firmly ever since, that if we had been left to ourselves there would never have been another shot fired."

Such is the power of the one Isaiah called the Prince of Peace. Such is the promise of the angels who sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace" (Luke 2:14).