

“Peace: What Will It Take? What Does It Look Like?”

Date: December 5, 2010

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Matthew 3:1-12; Romans 15:4-13 *Theme:* Peace

Occasion: Peace; Advent 2, sermon series “A Life-Giving Christmas”

At Christmas-time, we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul is quoting from the book of Isaiah - “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations.”

Jesus is the root of Jesse, His ancestry going all the way back to royal line of King David, whose father was Jesse. Jesus is the One who will rule the nations, both Jew and Gentile. Jesus is the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies, the One who is to bring peace to the world.

But in the 2,000 years since his appearance on earth, there has been anything but “peace on earth, and good will among people.” What will it take? What does peace look like, when practiced? In the monologue that Chris McClelland delivered at the beginning of our worship service, her character delivered these closing lines:

“Where’s the peace on earth everybody sings about? It’s not happening around the world, and it’s not happening in *my* home. This year I want Christmas peace. Real, true, straight-from-God peace. Peace for my world. Peace for me. That’s what I want my Christmas to be. I just wish I knew how to find it.”

Let me offer three suggestions as to how we can discover peace this Christmas.

First, “**Be reconciled to God.** A great deal of the inner turmoil that we experience, and all of the conflict and violence that we see and experience in the world, is a direct result of sin. Sin has separated us from our Creator. Jesus came to reconcile the human race to God.

Jesus left the glory of Heaven and was born of woman, eventually to die on a

cruel cross, all to reconcile us to God. The manger of Bethlehem and the cross of Calvary are intimately connected. Jesus came to save sinners. That's what we celebrate at Christmas-time - the birth of our Savior - the One who came to forgive us of our sins.

Do you want to know peace? Then ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart and to forgive you of all your sin. Tell the Lord of the universe what it is that you have done to break your relationship with God. Ask for forgiveness. The Bible tells us, God is faithful and just, quick to forgive and slow to anger.

I know for myself, the first time and every time that I go to God in prayer, seeking his mercy, I experience a peace that passes understanding. I feel God's love and forgiveness flow over me. My guilt and my shame bathed in the light of God's love. Peace, you see, comes from a renewed and right relationship with God. Ask Christ into your heart and feel God's grace at work in your life.

Second suggestion for peace - **surrender your worries and your anxieties to God.** You know, just because you give your heart to Jesus, and you know that you're saved, that does not mean all of the problems of life will simply disappear. We are still human beings, tempted and tested by the trials of life.

That's why we have to bring our problems, our worries, our fears to God in prayer. But realize - God will not necessarily solve your problems, or make a situation instantly wonderful. But there is power in prayer - to reunite us with God, to reconnect us with the source of life and love and power.

And there comes a peace to us when we remember, that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God, nothing! No matter what happens to us, God is with us. God will never forsake us, and there is great peace in knowing that.

Third suggestion - **we must work for peace in the world.** Broken

relationships destroy peace in the world. We need to be reconciled with everyone that we can be, AND, we need to work at the ministry of reconciliation in the world.

Listen to what it says in 2 Corinthians 5:19 - "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And God has committed to us the message of reconciliation."

I have to confess to you that I was not looking forward to preaching this sermon. You see, there was a person in my life that I was having some problems with. I thought that we had talked and worked things out, but we still weren't right. There wasn't any overt conflict taking place, no harsh words, no angry voices, no acts of hostility.

There was just this stony silence between us. I certainly wasn't feeling any peace, and I was feeling like a hypocrite - getting up in the pulpit and preaching about peace, when there was this relationship in my life that was broken.

I am pleased to tell you that we had a break-through this past week, and God has helped us to reconcile, to put things in the past, and to mend our relationship. That's what peace looks like, the lion and the lamb lying down together. A broken friendship, restored. Enemies reconciled. A handshake that says, let the past be in the past, and let's move forward. That's what peace looks like.

I invite us all, this holiday season, to think about the relationships in our own lives that are broken, and pray to God that they might be restored. To the best of your ability, with the help of God, try to be reconciled with all. It takes work. It takes humility. It takes time. It doesn't always happen overnight. As Christ died so that we might be reconciled to God, so let us die to our egos, that we might be reconciled to one another.

We not only need to be reconciled with our neighbor, we also need to work for peace. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 6, verse 9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” This past week I was so impressed with the work of the Benedictine sisters when they held a prayer vigil on the spot where a family had been murdered.

They have been doing this for some time, going back to the place where a violent crime has taken place and reclaiming that spot for peace. In essence saying, from now on we pray that this will be a peaceful place.

I am so impressed by what is happening among some of the Israeli and Palestinian people. It doesn't make the news and we don't often hear about it, but there are Palestinians and Israelis who are working together in the market place, who are creating community centers, building hospitals and schools. They are showing us what peace looks like, so-called enemies living together in harmony.

What can you and I do? Where you hear gossip about another person, offer a good word. Where there is a situation of conflict, do what you can to bring healing. If you have tumultuous relationships in your life, do what you can to bring about peace.

Pray for your enemies, that they may be blessed. Rest assured that God knows their deepest needs. One of the biggest blessings in my life has been to learn the secret of praying for the people with whom I disagree, or the people who have hurt me.

The Hebrew word for peace is Shalom. But it means so much more than that. It is the generic word for hello and goodbye. It is also a blessing, wishing for the other person wholeness of life. In essence, asking God to give to them that which will make their life complete. To pray for peace, is to seek the well-being of the

other. Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons and daughters of God.”

What will it take for there to be peace on earth? First, be reconciled to God yourself. Second, surrender your worries and anxieties to God. And third, work for peace in the world. Let us honor the birth of the Prince of peace, so that it might be true, peace on earth, and good will among all people. Amen? Amen!