

WELCOME 23 December 2018 – 3 Advent '18 C

Isaiah 9:2-7 & Luke 1:57-79

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here. Please stay with us for morning tea after worship...

The preparations are almost complete. Tree's up. Presents wrapped. Food is bought. The tinsel sparkles. All is ready for the picture perfect Christmas. Maybe... Deep down we know...all that glitters is not gold. Despite the festive decorations, beautifully wrapped presents & aromas of togetherness, there is one thing missing: peace. We're on edge. Wound up like a spring. In defense mode. At a heightened state of sensitivity & fragility. A misunderstood action, a thoughtless word, a dissatisfied response, an indifferent reception, or an inebriated spirit & the mood is shattered, leaving splinters of hurt & discomfort, breaking relationships into a thousand pieces. Or at best...simply worn out...too exhausted to truly en-joy...

Into this mess, the Prince of Peace comes to bind together in love, to strengthen with grace, to heal broken relationships, to forgive sin, to restore things to the way they are supposed to be.

*For a child is born to us, a son is given to us.
Rule & Dominion will rest on his shoulders.
And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

We'll explore & experience that today...

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Arise, shine, for your light has come, & the glory of the Lord has risen upon you... - Is 60:1

O Key of David, Radiant Dawn royal Power of Israel, eternal light, & sun of justice...Lord Jesus you are the fulfillment of all human hoping longing & striving. Come, break down the prison walls of sin & for all who dwell in darkness & the shadow of death lead us into freedom & the splendor of your presence. Come to us again today with your love, with your power & with your grace. Lead us to the Father's house & the way of peace. In your name we pray...Amen

4 ADVENT '18 C – CHRISMASMESS: PRINCE OF PEACE

FAITH CHAT:

1. Share a time when you felt your life was “peaceful.” Why?
2. Where do you need Jesus to bring peace to your life? If you wanted to cultivate it...How?

It's weird...I've been thinking about this poor woman ever since I first saw that image about 3 weeks ago. She's a shop assistant at a Victoria's Secret store somewhere in the US. She's surrounded & nearly being run over by mobs of “Black Friday” shoppers...jumped on the table for safety. What's Black Friday?

It's the Friday immediately following Thanksgiving in the US (4th Thursday in Nov) & all the retail outlets are open with big sales & lots of merchandise hoping that their sales THAT day will make their year a profitable one...put them “in the black.” They'll make enough \$\$\$ THAT day to push their year into profit.

Why has she been on my mind? Well look at her. She's being overrun by folks who want to get a good deal or the last of a certain item...She's terrified because she knows every year someone gets killed in the crush. There's always a ruckus somewhere as shoppers & retailers collide like whales at the sardine migration... This is at Victoria's Secret...I know what they sell. Overpriced Ladies underwear. If my memory is correct...little bitty underwear. They don't sell underwear for real people...

I don't care what underpants are made of...how wonderful they look...Is there any reason to step on someone's neck just to get overpriced underpants? I think I know what her definition of “peace” would be...No more Black Fridays...Maybe some tear gas & riot police to clear the store...I reckon she's like most of us ...this first hit me a few weeks back...“peace” to her means absence - stillness - silence - no mad rush no crush of people or things or expectations...peace & quiet

I've been thinking about that “peace” word...& how we seem to have so little of it in what has become in our lifetime “the silly season” & how when we think of peace we genuinely think of absence. What I said a couple weeks back...Peace for most of us is the absence of strife/struggle/distress/mobile phones or noise or TV...or crowds or even family...we go away to get away...create some space/absence of bothersome people.

But when I go to the Bible...two words most commonly used for “peace” don't convey that idea of absence at all. In the NT...the word you're seeing when you see “peace” is likely the Gk word *εἰρήνη* - *eirene* It comes from a root that means to “bind together” & finds its common use outside the Bible in weaving...like making cloth. A thousand threads dumped on a table is a mess...but thousands of threads woven together - rightly & intimately related to one another in literally a million ways. Each thread woven over, under, around, & through the others at thousands of points. Only then do you get a fabric that is beautiful & strong, that covers, fits, holds, shelters, & delights. Oddly enough...that's a pretty fitting image for “peace” – to be bound together in intimate beautiful right relationship...woven together...I like that.

The OT word we've heard before is the Hebrew *שָׁלוֹם* – *shalom* - shalom actually implies fullness completeness wholeness...not an absence of anything but the presence of all things in their proper place & perspective...the presence of all things that restore harmony & health & balance...It's the presence of all things in their proper place perspective & relationships...In very real terms, *eirene* & *shalom* carry similar implications...all things together in proper relationship & proper place & rightly connected... it's restoration not deprivation.

In fact the whole idea of peace as “absence of distractions” or the “stilling of clamouring” is Buddhist...Buddhism in a nutshell teaches that all life is suffering/travail & that suffering comes from our unfulfilled longings & desiring...We want & don't have & work to get & are still not satisfied so we suffer or we cause suffering to someone else...The path out of suffering is to do away with our desires – to shed our wants – to dispense with distractions & clamourings – to create that longed for peace through various efforts to offload desire...eliminate want desire longing create an absence of all those things & you'll have peace...

What did we hear this morning? John, the forerunner is born. Remember Zechariah has been muted for the whole term of Elizabeth's pregnancy because he just couldn't/wouldn't grasp the miracle God was working in him & Elizabeth in preparation for the birth of the Messiah/Jesus. But now his voice is restored & he breaks into a song of prophetic joy:

“Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited & redeemed his people. He has sent us a mighty Saviour born from the royal line of his servant David just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago. Now we will be saved from our enemies & from all who hate us. He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant — the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham. We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear, in holiness & righteousness for as long as we live. And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you

will prepare the way for the Lord. You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness & in the shadow of death, & to guide us to the path of peace."

Look at what Zechariah says-1st note the goal/end result: *guide us to the path of peace* What God intends is that we live walk carry out our days in peace. That we exist woven together in intimate connection to one another...rightly related to God & each other *AND* God will make that happen... Zechariah says that everything unfolding under God's hand from now on is to make that peace real lasting enduring & secure.

You know what...THAT'S what God intended from day one of Creation. THAT was the original design of all creation... THAT is what is being restored in these 2 births so close in time. The *prophet of the Most High who prepares the way of the Lord & the Mighty Saviour from the royal line of David* are the first sign of that restoration & the Restorer Himself who we know is also named "Prince of Peace." Zechariah says without question God's design is right. God built us for right relationship with him & with those around us. What sin & rebellion & turning away from God has destroyed God is restoring.

This prince of peace is just that...Jesus restores our relationship with the Father... He establishes whole full relationships among us (he makes us brothers & sisters not competitors or adversaries) & he rebuilds our relationship with our own hearts & lives... When you understand you are beloved...a child of God...forgiven & empowered to bear God's image & live in his presence & do his purpose in this world...your identity is reclaimed forever for good...your life is literally made new in Christ... Zechariah says God's design is right & he will restore it anew.

But then in that very same breath Zechariah declares God's desires are good. Just listen to what Zechariah says God is up to...God comes to redeem – God keeps his promises – God is merciful – God wants us to be in his presence without fear – holy & righteous means that sin is wiped away - our rebellion forgiven - our self-will transformed into hearts that are like his. He comes to give light into our darkness – to lift the shadow of death...

How many live with an image of God the avenger God the angry God the vengeful God the punisher or even God the indifferent? The joy that bursts forth here is that God is showing himself for who he really is...Love – faithful love – restoring love – redeeming love – rescuing love - forgiving love - tenderness - compassion – mercy.

Growing Praise today has this from Martin Luther - "The sin underneath all our sins, is to trust the lie of the serpent that we cannot trust the love & grace of Christ, & must take matters into our own hands."

Think about that...underneath every sin...turning away from God – disobedience – rebellion – selfish self-gratifying thought/word/deed is the lie that God can't be trusted & it's on me to make my life work right. How does that usually work out?

I know I've told you this before...but when our sister saint Johanna Tunder was alive I used to go take her communion...She was wonderfully faithful - a giant in her trust in Jesus...One time I popped in & the TV was on so we watched the news together for a while & after a few segments rolled by she pointed to a group of world leaders G-20 I think & she said something profound..."Look at them...all so smart & the more they do the worse things get." She put her finger right on it...our need is larger than our résumé Our emptiness – brokenness – disappointment – sense of longing for just something to go right...human sickness...what the Bible calls "sin" is bigger than we are...all the symptoms in the world around us are bigger than we are...& the more we do the worse things get...that lie of the serpent kills us...daily...

But Zechariah sings that not only is God's design right & God's desires good but finally that God's destiny for you is secure. *And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness & in the shadow of death, & to guide us to the path of peace."* Staring into the face of his newborn son Zechariah speaks with the assurance of God's eternal promise that he will redeem & restore & never release any who trust in him. That assurance finds fulfillment in the cross of Jesus.

Peace is not about the absence of trouble from our lives, but the reassurance that no matter what we face in life Jesus is with us, & that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. There's a persistent reality in the Christmas narratives of the Bible Jesus Prince of Peace is "God with us" The promise is that there is never a time when "God is not with you" & Jesus is God's firm assurance that he will guard your heart & guide your life & be with you in all things until this life ends when he will walk with you into his eternal presence...his eternal peace...his fullness...his abundance ...when all things are made new & complete in Him.

God's design right. God's desires good. God's destiny for you is secure. The Prince of Peace comes to bind together in love, to strengthen with grace, to heal broken relationships, to forgive sin, to restore things to the way God intended...you & me.

Let's pray with that in mind...

Lord Jesus we wait for your coming. Come & fill us with your presence. Complete our lives by your power. Heal us by your grace and rebuild our relationships with your love. In all things, prepare us for whatever you require of today and lead us in faith wherever you call us to go. In your Name we pray...Amen.