

It's my pleasure again to open the word of God for us.

And we carry on our advent theme, building to the celebration of the birth of Jesus. And we take these weeks to consider again why God became a man, why the son of God went through the full process of being carried in a woman's womb and growing into a complete person.

To understand the life and teachings of Jesus, to understand what it means for us to be followers of Jesus we need to understand how and why his life began.

And so this morning we're focussing on the idea of peace, the promise of peace, the gift of peace.

So we begin with one of the most famous quotes from Isaiah.

Isaiah's prophecies come at a time when everything seems to be falling apart for Israel, they seem to be losing everything that God had promised them.

And in chapter 9 he writes

Isaiah 9

! Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory.

6 For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us.

The government will rest on his shoulders.

And he will be called:

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 His government and its peace
will never end.

He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David
for all eternity.

The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies
will make this happen!

Prince of Peace

We need to be little careful with the word Prince. Mostly we hear it used to describe the sons and grandsons and Queen Elizabeth. Poor old Prince Charles is just waiting for his mom to pass on so he can take the throne. He doesn't really DO anything but wait. He just sits grounding hoping she'll die of old age before he does. He's the crown prince.

But most princes in history had bigger roles to play. In some cases Princes ran countries without a king or Queen above them, or they ruled an area within a bigger kingdom. They led armies to war.

This Prince of Peace is powerful. He will be the source of peace. He will bring peace.

And at his birth that was a common theme.

Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist also has miracles surrounding his birth just a few months before Jesus' birth.

Luke 1

57 When it was time for Elizabeth's baby to be born, she gave birth to a son.

67 Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy:

78 Because of God's tender mercy,
the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,
79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
and to guide us to the path of peace."

And there was the message to the shepherds.

Luke 2

8 That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. 9 Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, 10 but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. 11 The Saviour—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! 12 And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

But what is peace?

Now, as 2018 comes to a close the United Nations says there are close to 80 million refugees worldwide, forced out of their homes by war and violence.

Of course 2018 is the 100th anniversary of the end of WWI, the war to end all wars in 1918.

In 1818 the world's maps were being redrawn to reflect the new peace that was brought in by the end of the almost 20 years of Napoleonic wars.

Historians point out over and over again that the "peace" that ends one war usually sets up the alliances and tactics that will be used on the next war.

So what is peace?

Is it simply absence of war? Is war the absence of peace?

At the last supper, as Jesus is giving his last orders and encouragements before his arrest he says this:

John 14:26-27

But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.

The opposite of Peace isn't War. It's Fear.

To be afraid of people from that country, that religion, that province, that city, that church, that side of our church.

Why if they don't like us? What if they want what we have? What if they're not willing to admit that we're right?

Fear never leads to peace.

But let's set wars and rumours of wars aside. God has a plan he will establish a kingdom of peace. I think that will have more to do with people learning the truth about him than with him beating up the bad guys. But let's set that aside.

That's obviously not what Jesus was referring to at the last supper.

I am leaving you with a gift — peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. - Jesus

A gift of peace of mind and peace of heart.

A few minutes later he says

John 16:32-33

But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”

Right here he's saying that the peace he gives does not mean an absence of trials and sorrow.

"You're going to have many trials and sorrows, and you're going to have peace in me."

But in the middle of this whole idea, he also explains peace. He says:

"But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me."

It's amazing to think that when the time was right for the son of God to enter the human race, he didn't make it easy on himself. His entire life was surrounded by controversy. His birth was not easy. He lay in a manger being worshipped by shepherds, not a palace worshipped by world leaders. It was a difficult life with a horrific end and yet he lived in peace - he lived in absolute, unquestioned knowledge of his father's love for him.

He wasn't afraid of what others thought, he wasn't afraid of what others said, he wasn't afraid of what others would do to him, although he wasn't looking forward to it. He lived with absolute assurance of the work of God in his life.

And when things got their worse and the apostles all left him alone, well, he wouldn't really be alone. "The father is with me."

Peter gives us some insight into Jesus peace. He said

1 Peter 2:23

He did not retaliate when he was insulted,
nor threaten revenge when he suffered.
He left his case in the hands of God,
who always judges fairly.

That helps us understand the mindset behind some of his teachings that seem so hard.

Matthew 5

38 "You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'

39 But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also.

You are a child of God. Jesus went to the cross with you on his mind. You will never be held accountable for one single sin or character flaw because they are washed in the blood of Jesus who this moment is preparing a paradise for you.

Don't fear some guy who's having a bad day because everything he has is invested in succeeding in this world. Poor guy. He slaps you. It hurts. If he's going to slap again ask him to do it on the other cheek 'cause this one's already hurting.

"Feel better? Are you done?" He's not at peace with anything. You're at peace with God. So what's a slap?

Matthew 5

40 If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too.

See what impact that has on a court room when you offer to pay more than the judge says.

Every thing you have is simply borrowed from God and it's all for his glory. It's just a coat. Be at peace. Let it go. And the scarf and gloves.

Matthew 5

41 If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles.

The soldier is used to people fearing him and hating him. They had to carry his stuff one mile but one mile only, mumbling and grumbling the whole way. Counting the steps. The last step

a the one mile mark - that's it. They drop the stuff. Turn and go back to their lives wishing death and disaster on the soldier. So here's what you do: you carry their stuff and chat - count the steps - get to the end of the mile - smile and say, "Shall we go on? As I was saying ..."

What illustrations would Jesus use in our lives?

The person at work who always drains the coffee pot and doesn't make a new batch?

The driver that cuts you off and makes 3/100ths of a second late?

The waitress that brought you the wrong salad dressing?

The examples are endless but the examples don't matter. What matters is PEACE. PEACE with God. YOUR peace with God.

Later in Matthew Jesus is sending out the apostles for ministry and he says:

Matthew 10

28 "Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. 30 And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.

Peace is absolutely reconciliation with God.

Seeing Him as He is.

Seeing us as He sees us.

I love this picture. Team Hoyt. And amazing story of a son in a wheel chair and a father who powered them through marathons and strong-man competitions. Years ago there was a popular video making the rounds. Someone had taken footage of these guys and made a video with the song "I Can Only Imagine."

Their first run was a fund raising run the son want to be in so the dad took him in his chair and they did the run. Afterwards the son said, "Dad, when I'm running I don't feel disabled."

I first saw that video at a time when all of my worst fears were coming true. I had wanted to do so much for God: be the perfect Christian, the best man, the ideal father, the legendary husband, the perfect teacher. I was afraid I was going to fail so I worried more and tried harder and it all fell apart.

And I saw that video and realized I had spent my life thinking I was the father. Thinking I had to carry everyone else. But, God in his mercy showed me that I was the son. He was carrying me the whole way. My fears and efforts and failures had only made me miserable and hadn't helped anyone else either.

And when I could stop counting on me for everything and start counting on Him - counting on his love for me, counting on his care for me - then I didn't feel disabled anymore. I felt peace.

Jesus was born as a human, lived a sinless life and died in our place so that every sin, every flaw, every failure can be dissolved by his blood so that we stand perfect and holy in the eyes of our father.

Then he rose again, conquered the power of death, conquered Satan who hates us, rose to the right hand of God where he is at this moment interceding for us, whispering in the father's ear about us, directing his angels to care for us, preparing a paradise for us. We are not forgotten or alone. Even if everyone leaves us we are not alone because we are with God. We are at peace. A slap on the face, a stolen jacket, carrying an enemies stuff for a mile or two - cannot rob us of our peace IF we are grounded in our knowledge of God - if we are reading the scriptures to find God's will for us, if we are lifting our lives up to him in prayer.

Oh what peace we often forfeit
oh what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer

What a friend we have in Jesus.