

Christmas Eve Luke 2:1-14  
First Trinity Lutheran  
December 24, 2012

### **Finding Peace**

The “peace of Christmas Eve?” and the “peace of Jesus Christ?” are they the same. We all know that Christmas Eve is about peace. Ever since we were children and brought to church on Christmas Eve, we were taught that tonight was the birth of the Prince of Peace. Tonight was one of the special nights of all nights. And so we come to church on Christmas Eve and we sing these lovely carols about peace, carols which we know so well, those carols that we learned in childhood.

“Silent Night, holy night, all is calm and all is bright, round yon virgin mother and child, holy infant so tender and mild, sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.” “It came upon a midnight clear that glorious song of old, when angels bending near the earth, they touched their harps of gold. Peace on earth...” “Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King. Peace on earth...” Tonight some of us have come because we believe in this peace, we believe in the Prince of Peace. We believe that our lives can be touched by peace and that we too can be children of peace. That is why on this night all over the world people will come to church on this Christmas Eve.

Tonight, we have come to hear those words of peace from Isaiah, the prophet. We have come to hear those beautiful images of peace; that our God is a “wonderful counselor, mighty god, everlasting father and ...prince of peace...and of his government and of his peace, there shall be no end!!! Peace will be established with justice and righteousness and the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.” We have come to hear those words tonight, those magnificent metaphors about peace.

Wouldn't that be nice ... to live in that kind of world? ... where there was no hurting or no harming or no injuring of other people ... Wouldn't it be nice to be that kind of person?

Who did not hurt others? ... And wouldn't it be nice to live in that kind of a home? Or live in that kind of family? Or live in that kind of neighborhood? Or in that kind of city or world? But ...but...but it all seems to be a big farce. Such a mockery. There is so much hurting in this world. There is so much harming of one another. There is so much destruction and so many wars, and so little peace. On this Christmas Eve there is no peace in so many parts of the world. Tonight there is no peace in Bethlehem, Syria, Afghanistan, Palestine, Libya, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Newtown Connecticut. Tonight there is no peace in so many homes tonight.

There is no Christmas peace in so many people's personal lives. There are so many tensions and so much stress and we get ulcers and migraines and heart attacks and we explode in anger at one another, sometime over nothing. Listen to the words the poet Longfellow in the words of his poem, Christmas Bells. "I heard the bells on Christmas day, their old familiar carols play, and wild and sweet the words repeat, peace on earth good will towards men. In despair I bowed my head, there is no peace on earth I said, but hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth good will towards men."

As story is told by Walter Henry. He tells this story of a Christmas truce during WWII, where the sun goes down on Christmas Eve, and soldiers are not supposed to shoot at one another until the next morning. The Germans and the Americans are on opposite sides of the line, opposing each other. There was a young American soldier, and he was just getting ready to push that detonator to explode a set of mines on the other side. A flare went up, and he knew that it was the beginning of the Christmas peace, the Christmas truce. He settled down into his foxhole and as the night went on, in the distance, he heard this beautiful German tenor voice, "stieliege nacht, heilige nacht." He listened...and listened...and he knew that voice anywhere...the voice of Johan Liebr...his music teacher from Munich. Johan Liebr started to sing the second stanza, and the American soldier began to sing with him...and there

was a momentary break in Liebr's voice...a crack in his voice...but he continued...and together they sang of Silent Night, one in German, the other in English. The night continued. One would begin to sing a Christmas carol and the other would join in. The other would begin a Christmas carol and the other would join in, singing through the night. But...but...but...dawn came. It was time. A flare pierced the sky; the truce was over; and the bombs started to fly again.

Is there something wrong with us as human beings? Is there some fundamental flaw to our human nature? What is wrong with us? What is wrong with us that we are the only creatures on earth that murders and tortures our own species? What is wrong with us? That we make weapons capable of destroying millions of people within a span of hours? Why is peace so hard for us to learn? The answer to this question is because we are deeply flawed people, and that is why God sent us his son, Jesus, the Prince of peace: Jesus says: I have come to bring you peace, to teach you to walk in the paths of peace. I have come to teach you what you need to learn most...to be a person of peace.

Where does it begin? Where does it always begin? It begins here with me...with you. When the Prince of Peace finally comes to live in us. When the peace of the Prince of Peace comes and lives within you, when the goodness of Jesus Christ lives in you, you do not hurt...or harm...or injure ...another human being.

But this Christmas peace does not live within us unless we live our lives with justice and righteousness. Now I have inserted two big words here justice and righteousness that need to be explained. Let us use a well know Christmas illustration. We are all familiar with the Christmas scene where two horses pull a sleigh for of people down the road. This could almost look like a Budweiser commercial when two huge Clydesdales pull a wagon. In this illustration one of the horses is named justice and the other is named righteousness. Behind the two workhorses of justice and righteousness is the sleigh of peace... Peace always

follows after justice and righteousness. If you want peace, you find it after you pursue justice and righteousness.

So what is this justice? It is the structuring of society, the structuring of our economy and government, so that the poor are taken care of e.g. the widows, the orphans, the disabled, and the blind. The most important function of a government is not defense. In spite of what all the books say, in spite of the fact that we live in a defense related economy, the most important function of government is the pursuit of justice. It is the organization of law and society in such a way that widows and orphans and the maimed and blind are taken care of. That is the primary purpose of government, according to the Bible.

Justice is the desire for fairness within our own families. People want to be treated fairly, to not be taken advantage of. It's not fair in a family system when certain people get "stuck" with all the dirty work, the hard work. Fairness is not taking advantage of others in the family. Fairness is everyone doing their fair share within a family. It's hard to have peace in a family if you don't have fairness in terms of work and responsibility. ...Justice is the ordering of society and family so that those in need are taken care of, and if there is no justice and fairness, there will be no peace within that society or family. For peace always comes behind that great big workhorse called justice.

The second work horse is righteousness. It too is a great big Clydesdale. Righteousness is right relationships within our individual lives. If justice is concerned about the organization of society, righteousness is concerned about our primary life relationships...that I would have close and kind relationship with my partner, my children, my friends, my work associates, my neighbors, with all people.

Righteousness primarily begins and ends with forgiveness. The only way that you can live with a flawed person like you and like me is with the gift of forgiveness, the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. And if anyone doesn't think that forgiveness is not hard work, if anyone

thinks that forgiveness is easy, that person has not been deeply hurt by another. In the real world where we harm and hurt and injure one another, my God, do we need to forgive one another!

Justice. Righteousness. Those two big Biblical words are like great gigantic Clydesdales in front of the sleigh of peace.

What is the “peace of Christmas eve?” “Christmas eve peace” has to do with the candles, the quietness of Christmas Eve, a silent night, a lovely sanctuary, beautiful songs, and snow falling on the ground. It’s a lovely experience but can last only a few hours.

The “peace of Jesus Christ?” The “peace of Christ” has to do with those people in whom the Prince of Peace comes to live. When the Prince of Peace lives within our heart, we become one of those workhorses who work for justice and rightness.

At the beginning of the sermon I quoted the poet Longfellow. Again wrote: “And in despair I bowed my head, there is no peace on earth I said, for hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth good will toward men.” But then he continues. There is more! Longfellow does not leave us on a note of despair. “Then pealed the bells more loud and deep, God is not dead nor doth he sleep, the wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, good will toward all.” Let the Peace of Christ come into your heart this night and let it live there forever.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord, forever and ever. And may we always work for justice and righteousness and in doing so we will know peace. Amen.