



## SERMON

# Light the Candle of Peace: Some Assembly Required

Isaiah 11:1-9 and II Corinthians 5:16-20

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There are two basic attitudes toward life: one of hope and one of dread, one of trust and the other of fear, one of optimism and the other of gloom. A misprint of a weather forecast read like this: "There is a five percent chance of . . . today and tomorrow." I would hope that the odds are better than that!

You may know that comedian W.C. Fields died with money in hundreds of bank accounts which were never located. It is said that wherever he went he opened a bank account. Often he used fictitious names and kept no written records of his deposits.

At one point, Fields told a friend in confidence that he had over seven hundred accounts and knew exactly where they were. Unfortunately, he died without telling anyone else the locations of those accounts or the name in which they were held. He had one account in Berlin that alone was said to have \$50,000 in it. During the bombing of that city, however, all traces of that bank and the money were destroyed.

Fields attributed this strange behavior of storing money in all these cities to a dream he had repeatedly in which he saw himself stranded in a strange city without money or friends. The dread, which this dream produced in Fields' heart, caused him to open these strange, anonymous accounts in every city in which he performed.

There are some people who live with such a feeling of dread and doom about their lives that they dismiss the possibility of peace. Even when life is being good to them, they just know that it cannot last. Somewhere, sometime, somehow, something out there is going to happen to them that will wreck their best-laid plans, frustrate their fondest dreams and crush everything they hold dear.

That is one attitude towards life. Fortunately, it is not the Christian attitude. It was not the Apostle Paul's attitude to be sure. Paul knew that we live in a difficult world. He had experienced more than his share of sorrow and suffering. But Paul knew that somewhere, sometime, somehow, something good was out there waiting for him. He knew that tomorrow would be a better day than today. He believed that lasting joy and peace were not only possibilities in life but would someday be permanent realities. That is why he writes in Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

This is the season of the year when we celebrate the God of peace. The mood of Advent is one of joyful anticipation. It infects all of society. Even in turbulent times, like the current one, the bells, lights, sights and sounds of this pre-Christmas-time of the year speak to us that peace on earth and good will toward all are still possibilities. There is far more than a five percent chance of today and tomorrow. Because of a babe born 2,000 years ago in a little town called Bethlehem, the Prince of Peace came into our world.

Advent is hope and peace for the world. H.G. Wells once wrote a story titled “In the Days of the Comet.” Well’s story is a somewhat typical science fiction fantasy. A mysterious green vapor of unknown origin descends from the clouds and covers the earth. The vapor has the immediate effect of putting all the earth’s people into a deep sleep for three days.

When they finally awake, something amazing has happened. Their inner nature is radically transformed. Petty quarreling comes to an end. Instead of seeking fame, power and wealth the people of the world seek to serve one another. Love, kindness and generosity become more important than greed or success. In short, the perfect society emerges, a society in which the dignity of every human being is honored.

The prophet Isaiah looked forward to this kind of day. He looked forward to a day when “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.” (11:6). Of course, Isaiah was not anticipating a green vapor that would come down out of the clouds. He was prophesying “a shoot [that would come] from the stump of Jesse . . .” That is Isaiah’s way of saying that there was a Messiah coming who would establish a new world order, who would bring into being a new kingdom in which peace is more important than power and service is more important than domination.

The concern of the prophet was not only one of personal salvation but also the salvation of God’s people, and through God’s people, the salvation of the world. What good would it be if we save the individual but leave him or her in a world that tramples upon dignity and crushes aspiration? We need to affirm that when the Messiah, whom we call Jesus, came into the world He brought with Him the seed of a new kingdom, a kingdom that is still alive and still at work whenever the name of Jesus is on the lips of believers. It is a kingdom that has dispelled darkness, ignorance, exploitation and human slavery everywhere the good news is faithfully proclaimed. No tyrant can forever suppress it, no evil can forever resist its strength. Advent is peace for the world.

But Advent is also peace for individuals. Advent is peace for you and me.

We are in the same situation. We don’t know what the future holds, but our King knows, He who is King of kings and Lord of lords. Advent is a time when we are reminded that this is God’s world. God is at work in this world, and even though we may be surrounded by darkness, we know there is a light shining in the darkness that the darkness cannot overcome (John 1:5).

Damon Runyon once wrote a short story about a man he called Doc Brackett. Doc Brackett was a beloved old physician whose office was open to the poor and needy. He would get up in the middle of the coldest night and ride twenty miles to doctor a sick woman or child or to patch up some fellow who got hurt. Everybody in town knew Doc Brackett’s office over Rice’s clothing store. It was up a narrow flight of stairs. A sign at the foot of the stairs said: DR. BRACKETT, OFFICE UPSTAIRS.

Doc Brackett never married. The day he was supposed to marry he got a call to go out into the country and treat a child of undocumented migrant workers. His bride-to-be was so angry that she cancelled the wedding, but the parents of the child were very grateful when the child recovered.

For forty years, the sick and needy of that town had climbed up and down the stairs to Doc Brackett’s office. He never turned anyone away. Doc Brackett lived to be seventy years of age, and then one day he keeled over on the sofa in his office and died.

He had one of the largest funerals ever in those parts. Everyone turned out. The town’s people wanted to erect a nice tombstone for his grave but could not agree what should be engraved on the stone. The

matter dragged along and nothing was done. Then one day someone noticed that there was already a proper epitaph over Dr. Brackett's grave. The migrant parents of the child that Doc Brackett had saved many years back had worried about him having no tombstone. They had no money to buy a marker, so they simply took the sign from the foot of the stairs at Doc Brackett's office and stuck it over his grave. Now he had a fitting epitaph. It read simply, DR. BRACKETT, OFFICE UPSTAIRS.

During this season of the year we pay homage to the "Doc Bracketts" of this world and we declare that not only is the world a better place for their efforts but now they reside in a better place as well.

We are free to choose the attitude with which we confront life. We can believe that there is a five per cent chance of today and tomorrow or we can believe the Good News of Christmas that God is alive and well and at work in our world bringing in a kingdom of peace and justice and freedom. We can face the future with fear and foreboding, or we can jump into the mess and trust in the God who has sustained us through the years and has promised that He will never forget nor forsake us regardless of our situation. We can choose to live in continued darkness, or we can step out into the light of peace and strength. We can live for ourselves alone, or we can make the world a better place to live for all persons.

God has provided us with the vision. First described in Genesis, it was affirmed in Isaiah's prophecy, demonstrated through the life of Jesus and alive in all who work for peace.