

God with us Brings Peace

Sunday, December 23, 2018

10:30 AM

For most of us Christmas is not a peaceful time. The influence of cultural pressures has shaped the season into a stressful time of hurried busyness that leaves us frenzied and frazzled, worried and wondering just how all this fits together with the true reason for the season. After all there are decorations to put up, trees that need trimmed, presents to figure out, buy and then get wrapped, crowds to deal with, parties to plan and attend, houses to clean, meals to make, goodies to bake. There are programs at school and at church. And all that while we get ready to close out another year and a week later start a new one.

Sounds like what the kids were trying to teach us last week. Christmas can be crazy and busy but what about the peaceful. Where does that come from?

How peaceful is your Christmas season? If we're honest, we might choose words like *busy*, *hectic*, and *frantic* to describe our lives this time of year—or maybe all year round. Maybe it's an overloaded schedule that robs you of peace. Or maybe it's something more: relational conflict, pressure at work, a lost job, an illness. You name it. For many of us, peace sounds like a long way away. A good idea. A nice thought for the holidays. Something we long for. If only we could feel the peace of God with Us!

Images of Christmas and war don't easily fit together in our minds. The cold cruelty of war seems about as far as one can get from the warm generosity of the holiday season. The pain and suffering of battle contradict the joy and celebration of Christmas. But for those who fought in World War I, Christmas arrived right in the midst of an intense global battle. Life in the trenches was brutal and gruesome. New technologies such as tanks and mustard gas had advanced military capabilities to kill even more efficiently and painfully.

But against this backdrop, individuals chose peace. Early in the war, during December 1914, many German and British soldiers took peace into their own hands. On Christmas Eve, they sang and played carols to each other across the destroyed no-man's-land, finding that they knew the same songs even if the lyrics were in different languages. And early on Christmas Day, German soldiers walked across the scarred landscape, unarmed and shouting "Merry Christmas" to their enemies. Allied soldiers, a little distrustful at first, crawled out of their trenches and joined them, shaking hands, exchanging gifts of cigarettes and plum pudding, and they sang Christmas carols together. History.com says there was even a documented game of soccer during this unofficial cease-fire.

The Christmas Truce was never repeated. Unfortunately, the officers made sure of it by threatening punishments. But on that special day, enemies placed their shared humanity before their grievances and experienced the Christmas spirit of peace in a truly powerful way.

Wow, can you imagine? That must have been quite a sight to see those enemy soldiers sharing Christmas peace.

In a similar way, God's peace can fill us and rule within us even when we are surrounded by death and evil. God's presence and peace can pierce even dark and painful surroundings and circumstances, including any war or any emotional valley we find ourselves in.

Christmas is typically, and rightfully, thought of as a season of joy, but it can be a painful season for many people. Maybe you're one of them. What battles do you face today? What pain is relentlessly bombarding you as you hunker down in the trenches of life? What darkness haunts you even under the twinkling lights, candles, and decorations?

We may not be able to end the personal, emotional, cultural, or physical wars we are fighting this holiday season, but even in those darkest places, we can lean into the God who is with us. Today as we continue our Advent journey toward Christmas, we are focusing on and celebrating peace, the peace that has been brought into our world by Immanuel, God with Us. My hope is that today each of us will experience the comfort of Christ's peace deep within our souls.

Let's turn our attention to another field. Not a field of battle but a field of shepherds watching their flocks by night

Luke 2:8-14 (NIV)

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. **9** An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. **10** But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. **11** Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. **12** This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

1. Peace brings wholeness to the brokenness within us

The message to the shepherds was one of peace. Peace on earth and goodwill toward men. What needs peace more than a sin filled earth and the men who suffer because of the effects of sin in the world

Often our lives feel fractured by the wars of this life. Broken in a million pieces from battle after battle. But Jesus comes to put the pieces back together to heal and restore to reconstruct and make us complete. This is the peace that He brings to our souls

Sin seeks to tear us apart. To steal kill and destroy. But Jesus comes to Make us whole again - to forgive us and make us new - which means he puts the pieces together again, sometimes differently and even more beautiful than we were before. Like the frazzled mess of the backside of the tapestry he turns us over to reveal that he has created a beautiful Masterpiece.

*My Life is but a weaving
between my Lord and me;
I cannot choose the colors
He worketh steadily.*

*Oft times He weaveth sorrow
And I, in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper,
And I the under side.*

*Not til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why.*

*The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver's skillful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.*

*He knows, He loves, He cares,
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives His very best to those
Who leave the choice with Him.*



Peace on earth means he comes to put us back together with his love

In the words of the priestly blessing that God gave Moses that was to be spoken over the people

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24–26).

The Hebrew word used in that blessing and throughout the Old Testament is *shalom*, and it conveys rich, powerful meaning. So much more than just the absence of fighting, *shalom* reflects safety, completeness, and wholeness.

This is the type of peace brought by God with Us. Jesus is the Prince of Shalom foretold by the prophet Isaiah: *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever” (Isaiah 9:6–7).*

2. Peace brings quietness to the noises that bombard us

Like us, I'm sure the shepherd's lives were bombarded with many noises. But peace brings a quietness to the noise. It's as if heaven stopped time to say "HEY. THIS IS WHAT IS IMPORTANT. THIS IS WHAT YOU NEED TO HEAR. GOD HAS COME TO EARTH AND WILL BE WITH YOU"

We need this kind of peace because until the noise is quieted, we will never be able to hear the voice of God and the message he has for our lives

The psalmist declares that God's voices cries out and says "Be still and know that I am God." (**Psalm 46:10**) "The Lord almighty is with us." (**Psalm 46:11**)

Herod couldn't hear above the noise and neither could most of those around him.

Matthew 2:3 -

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

This is the peace that God with us brings. A quietness that allows us to hear the message of heaven

VIDEO: The Birds

3. Peace brings calmness to the calamities that surround us

Do you remember the story of the evening when the disciples were in the boat with Jesus and a terrible storm arose on the Sea of Galilee. In fact it was so bad that the disciples were sure they were going to die. Now Jesus was asleep in the back of the boat. The disciples woke him and accused him of not caring. He got up rebuked the wind and the waves and commanded the storm to be quiet. The storm obeyed. Sometimes I think his words were meant more for the internal storms that often churn within us rather than the wind and the waves. Remember today that He is master of the storm.

For this peace to come we must first hear another message. That night of the storm Jesus asked his disciples... "Why are you so afraid?" The night the angels visited the shepherds on the hillside with this message of peace, they first proclaimed... "Do Not Be AFRAID"

Last week we talked about the show-stealing scene in the Peanuts special *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, the one where Linus reads from the gospel of Luke.

Today I want to say a little bit more about it.

There's a detail in this scene that you may have never noticed.

As you remember, Linus is the one who always carries the blanket. It's called a security blanket, but it doesn't really symbolize security. It symbolizes insecurity — the fear of uncertainty, the fear of inadequacy.

In this scene, Linus takes the stage with his ever-present blanket and begins to recite the story...

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid...(Luke 2:9)

And then, when he gets to the part that says Fear not, he lets go of the blanket.

VIDEO: Charlie Brown Christmas

That insignificant piece of cloth representing all of his insecurities suddenly becomes unnecessary in light of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so the blanket falls to the floor.

The blankets we carry aren't nearly as conspicuous as his, but ours exist nonetheless:

The security blanket of needing more money.

Or needing a drink to make it through the day.

Or needing to build yourself up by putting others down.

Or needing to win at all costs.

We carry these blankets with us because we think they will shield us from fear. But they never can, and they never do.

There's only one way to escape fear — and that is to drop the blanket, once and for all, and decide that you will dare to live *this day* in the power of Jesus Christ.

He has promised to be with you always, and he has promised to see you through every uncertain moment. And his promise is worth the risk.

Linus shared with Charlie Brown the true meaning of Christmas: Because of this child born in Bethlehem — the one who came to bear our sorrows and take away our sins — you can drop the blanket and embrace God’s presence in your life. His peace brings calmness to the calamities that surround us

And so we do what Paul taught us in Philippians 4

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6–7).

This peace is what Jesus brought into and left in our world. It is the peace that calms our souls deeply. It is the calm acceptance that “it is well with my soul” no matter what swirls and storms around me. This is the peace we celebrate today. And when Jesus returns one day, He will heal all that’s been broken and restore God’s complete kingdom of shalom.

4. Peace brings praise to the messages that come from us

When we are not at peace, when we are broken and busy, confused, stressed and afraid much of what comes out of our mouths brings even more hurt and pain. We lash out. We complain. We gripe. We accuse, we vent, we tear down. We attack. We speak forth with worry and dread and fear.

But with the peace of God comes a new message - one of praise and glory to our God

Luke 2:13-14 (NIV)

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, **14** “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

And even more importantly, just a little bit later we read...

Luke 2:20 (NIV)

20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Something had changed the prince of peace had come into the world

Near the end of Jesus's life, He spoke these words to His disciples shortly before He was arrested and crucified: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

Jesus knew His followers were about to experience a crushing blow. But He had a gift for them that was different from anything in our world—His peace is not given as the world gives. It is not a gift that can be taken away nor is it something we can create on our own. It is not the absence of pain, hurt, noise, violence, or uncertainty. Peace is a person. Peace is Jesus with us as the Prince of Peace. And His assurance to the disciples was that even in what would appear to be the most hopeless of situations, He would be with them. His peace is His presence with us no matter the circumstances.

"For he himself is our peace," Paul told us in **Ephesians 2:14**. As we experience God's presence, we become interwoven in and inseparable from the peace that He is and that He gives to us.

Benediction

"May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way." —2 Thessalonians 3:16